

**THE ROLE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
THEORY**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Existing research on LBGTQ youth has focused on problem behaviors and considerably less attention has been devoted to positive developmental processes. However, positive youth development knowledge is critical to enabling researchers and practitioners to conduct work that might facilitate a successful transition to adulthood. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the transition to adulthood among LBGTQ youth. Data were generated through ethnographic techniques at an organized leisure program designed to serve LBGTQ youth and their heterosexual allies.

Thematic analysis yielded three manuscripts designed for journal submission. Results of the first study enhanced understanding of the similarities and differences between queer and heterosexual development. In particular, findings indicated that traditional assumptions about markers of success and developmental assets were highly relevant to most participants. The key difference between queer and heterosexual development was that LBGTQ populations must contend with compulsory heterosexuality or the network of normative expectations and sanctions which compel individuals to be heterosexual. For instance, participants shared how they hid their sexuality often for years to avoid being labeled as different or facing harassment.

I explored resistance and oppression in the leisure experiences of LBGTQ youth in the second study to further expand understanding of positive developmental processes among queer young people. Results indicated that participants resisted oppression in several ways, including creating spaces that preserved their autonomy. Others

deconstructed the privilege in their lives, which enhanced their understanding of how their actions intersect with the oppression of others.

In the third study, I explored features of positive developmental settings for LGBTQ youth to explore how leisure contexts might facilitate the transition to adulthood for queer youth. Two features emerged as particularly relevant: support for efficacy and mattering and integration of school, family, and community efforts. Results indicated that staff promoted social norms that respected the capabilities of all people. Further, the integration of program activities within the broader queer community led to important successes related to celebrating the heterogeneity of queer and promoting communion. I hope these manuscripts will enhance the capacity of leisure professionals to work with LGBTQ youth.

DEDICATION

For my family. Your love has been my oxygen tent.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO MANUSCRIPTS

This study grew out of an appreciation for youth development theory (YDT) developed over seven summers as a summer camp employee. During that time I saw numerous examples of the utility of YDT in practical contexts. Likewise, the scientific literature is replete with evidence for the usefulness of YDT in helping young people become successful adults (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). While scholars have begun to explore YDT among diverse groups including racially and economically diverse populations, but less is known about the transition to adulthood among young people that identify as Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ: cf. Torkelson, 2012).

Existing research has focused on the causes and incidence of problem behaviors among LBGTQ youth. In particular, scholars have offered theoretical rationale for the workings of oppression in the everyday lives of non-dominant sexualities (e.g., Butler, 1993; Rich, 1980). Inquiry into the incidence of problem behaviors among LBGTQ youth has generally shown that queer young people face a disproportionate risk of experiencing an array of negative behaviors including depression, drug use, and suicide (Saewyc, 2011). Studies of risk behavior have directed attention to these risks and might serve as a catalyst for policy and prevention work (Russell, 2005). However, little is known about processes of positive development for LBGTQ youth (Savin-Williams, 2008). This information gap represents an opportunity to extend the reach of YDT to

non-dominant sexualities and in so doing enhance the utility of youth development research and practice in supporting LGBTQ youth. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore YDT in a population of LGBTQ youth in the context of an organized leisure program.

Data were gathered to address this purpose at an organized leisure program designed to serve LGBTQ youth and their heterosexual allies, henceforth referred to as Pulse. The program operated primarily as a drop-in recreation center and was attended by about 300 young people between the ages of 12 and 19 per year. Although a wide range of activities were offered, young people spent the bulk of their time at Pulse hanging out—talking with their friends or watching movies. Data were gathered through three ethnographic techniques: semi-structured interviews ($n = 13$, 5 youth, 8 adults); four months of participant observation of the program and staff meetings and interactions; and informal conversations with many program staff and participants, and review of program documents such as the volunteer training manual.

Data analysis yielded three articles. In the first article, I explored how LGBTQ youth conceptualized their developmental goals and factors which promote the achievement of those ends. These findings were then compared with traditional conceptualizations of success and developmental assets within YDT. One key finding of the first study sparked the next two manuscripts—that queer youth must contend with a pervasive set of norms that enforce the idea that heterosexuality is expected, normal, and desired (i.e., compulsory heterosexuality). I explored one response to compulsory heterosexuality from a research perspective in the second study. That study was designed

to explore positive attributes of LGBTQ youth in order to counteract the pervasive negative discourse surrounding non-dominant sexualities that is due in part to compulsory heterosexuality. More specifically, I explored resistance and oppression in the organized leisure experiences of LGBTQ youth in the second study.

In the third study, I responded to compulsory heterosexuality from a professional practice perspective by exploring features of positive developmental settings for LGBTQ youth. It is my hope that these studies will enhance YDT research as well as practice with queer youth.

CHAPTER II

MANUSCRIPT 1: A QUEER PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

THEORY

Introduction

The transition to adulthood is a perennial concern. Societies organize social institutions so that young people can gain the habits and skills thought to ensure their survival (Mintz, 2004). The study of markers of successful adulthood and pathways thought to lead to that success are also central avenues of inquiry within the youth development literature. Markers of successful adulthood might be divided into one of three categories, traditional (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005), subjective (Arnett, 2000), or situational (Settersten, 2006). Traditional markers are normative indicators of successful development such as marriage, employment or school completion. Subjective markers are those defined by young people themselves as indicative of a transition to adulthood, which often include individualistic criteria such as taking responsibility for oneself. Finally, situational markers refer to the ways that individual experiences can affect one's perception of one's self as being a youth or an adult. For example, completing college per se may be less significant to being an adult than the constellation of related experiences (e.g., acquiring knowledge, leaving the parental home, etc.).

Research has shown that a variety of factors influence the ability of young people to become successful adults. The Search Institute developed a list of such factors in the

40 assets model (Scales & Leffert, 2004). The model describes 20 internal assets or individual qualities (e.g., honesty) and 20 external assets or features of an individual's immediate environment (e.g., supportive adults). Studies have indicated that assets are positively associated with thriving behaviors or negatively associated with risky behavior (Scales & Leffert, 2004). However, youth development is not a universal process. Pathways to successful development may vary based on a litany of factors, of which sexual identity is poorly understood (Torkelson, 2012).

Development for youth that identify as a non-dominant sexuality is likely to be similar to that of their heterosexual peers in many ways. Most people stand to benefit from having supportive adults in their lives, being honest, or completing school, regardless of sexual identity. However, the fact that all young people come of age in a society that privileges heterosexuality may introduce differences in development for those who identify as Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ) versus those who identify as heterosexual. In particular, young people that identify as LBGTQ negotiate compulsory heterosexuality in their everyday lives, i.e., a network of forces that position heterosexuality as normal/desirable and demean and/or exclude those that identify as a different sexual identity (Rich, 1980). For example, some sex education programs ignore homosexuality or reinforce heterosexuality as normal through positioning sex as reproductive and best saved for marriage (Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Fisher, 2009). Other research has indicated that when LBGTQ sexuality is discussed, it is framed in relation to a negative topic such as HIV (Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers, Summers, & Schlieffer, 2006). As such, queer young people are denied a potentially

important resource to learn about their sexuality. Further, Burrington (1998) documented legal obstacles that high school students encountered in attempting to create a gay-straight alliance club including the banning of all non-curricular clubs as a means to block its formation. Finally, religious arguments are frequently engaged to criticize unmarried, non-procreative sex as the decline of the so-called “traditional” family (Cobb, 2005). Since some religious institutions are not supportive of LGBTQ lifestyles, religious involvement may lead queer youth to question their identity and therefore damage development.

Compulsory heterosexuality is important to think about in the context of youth development because it can lead queer youth to negatively experience traditional developmental settings such as schools and leisure. For example, the latest GLSEN (2011) national school climate survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adolescents ($n = 8,584$) showed that 81.9% were verbally harassed and 38.3% were physically harassed because of their sexual orientation. Coker, Austin, and Schuster (2010) reviewed the literature on gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people and found that studies frequently showed that these youth faced consistent verbal and physical harassment in school, felt unsafe at school, and sometimes were truant because of this. These findings are symptomatic of a broader pattern in the LGBTQ literature, a high rate of negative experiences and risk across contexts (Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010).

However, compulsory heterosexuality may also contribute to unique developmental strengths among non-dominant sexualities. For example, thousands of queer youth and their heterosexual allies have formed gay-straight alliance clubs (GSA)

in response to school based discrimination. GSAs function as spaces where queer youth and their straight allies can support one another, advocate for social change, and educate their school communities (Lee, 2002; Schindel, 2008). Social advocacy, which is a central part of GSAs' approach, has occupied a prominent place in the lives of many individuals of non-dominant sexualities (Vaid, 1995) and may constitute a unique developmental asset. Further, communities where queers come together, such as GSAs, to support and learn from each other are often formed in response to discrimination. However, the differences and perhaps more important, the similarities between queer and heterosexual development require additional empirical study (Torkelson, 2012). In particular, current research has focused on the incidence of risk behaviors among LGBTQ youth to the near exclusion of examinations of factors which might protect youth from such risks (Talbert, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2008; Saewyc, 2011), although there are several notable counterexamples (e.g., Needham & Austin, 2010; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001).

Better understanding a queer perspective on development could facilitate the identification of commonalities between queer and heterosexual development and thus lead to youth development theory being more sensitive to the needs of diverse populations. This effort may also broaden the discussion of markers of adulthood. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore the transition to adulthood as it is experienced by young people that identify as LGBTQ.

Background

Youth development researchers have examined markers of adulthood in three ways: traditional markers of adulthood such as marriage and employment, markers of adulthood defined by young people themselves, and situational markers of adulthood. Both theory and empirical evidence have indicated resources within a person's social context can exert a significant influence on the process of growing up. However, heterosexual privilege may result in unique negative and positive effects on the transition to adulthood for LGBTQ youth which have not been examined in the context of youth development theory to date.

Markers of Adulthood

Traditional markers of adulthood including finishing school, community contribution, obtaining a job, leaving the parental home, getting married, and having children are noted by numerous researchers dealing with youth development (Hogan & Astone, 1986; Settersten & Ray, 2010). For example, Gambone, Klem & Connell (2002) reviewed the literature and determined three markers of successful development: be economically self-sufficient (facilitated by education and employment, be healthy and have positive social relationships (e.g., marriage), and make positive contributions to the community. Subjective markers refer to those that have been defined by youth participants as marking a successful transition to adulthood. These studies suggest normative markers such as employment and marriage retain importance in the eyes of many young people, but also that youth conceptualize adulthood in a different way than

traditional scholarly formulations (Lower, Dillon, Rhodes, & Zwiebach, 2012). In particular, several studies have indicated that the most important markers of adulthood are individualistic, such as accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and financial independence (Arnett, 1997, 1998; 2000).

Situational markers of adulthood capture the ways that individual experiences affect a person's perception as being a youth or an adult. There is some evidence to suggest that it is not achievement of the marker itself that crystallizes adulthood in the minds of people, but the cluster of associated experiences. For example, Settersten (2006) observed that having children can involve reorganizing one's time, roles, and priorities in response to actually being a parent for a period of time. As such, the shift in recognizing one's self as an adult may come sometime after having children. Other studies show that subjective assessments of being a youth or an adult are somewhat context-dependent. For example, spending the majority of one's time as a summer camp counselor around much younger people may highlight an individual's youth status whereas spending time with peers may comparatively compel the person to think of themselves as an adult (Hogan & Astone, 1986). Regardless of whether or not specific markers have been achieved, individual perceptions of youth or adult status may shift somewhat within and across situations.

Pathways to Adulthood

Research has indicated that the transition to adulthood is shaped by a variety of social ecological factors (Gambone & Connell, 2004; Pollock, 2008). Bronfrenbrenner

(1977) argued that development occurs in a web of interconnected systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem refers to the relationships between the person and their environment, such as experiences in school or at home. The mesosystem refers to interactions among elements of the microsystem, such as between home and school. The exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem to include factors which do not directly contain the developing person, such as the operation of major societal institutions such as government or mass media at the local level. The macrosystem refers to explicit or implicit normative expectations that shape everyday life such as dominant expectations for gender performances.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) added the chronosystem to later iterations of his ecological model to acknowledge the importance of the passage of time to development and change within other systems. Development then, involves the mutual adaptation between an individual and these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Silbereisen and Lerner (2007) have argued that one consequence of the integration of developmental systems is the potential for change—both individuals and their environments can be altered to facilitate growth. The potential for change legitimizes the search for factors which can optimize developmental processes. For example, the Search Institute's 40 assets model (Scales & Leffert, 2004) provides a useful way to think about how the microsystem can facilitate development and has achieved broad acceptance in the literature and professional practice (Benson, 2002; 2007). The model proposes 20 external assets and 20 internal assets. External assets are features of youth's environment or resources, such as caring neighborhood or family

boundaries. Internal assets refer individual qualities of youth such as honesty, personal power, and bonding to school. The Search Institute posits that assets exert a cumulative impact on decreasing risk and increasing thriving behaviors. Several studies undertaken with data collected by the Search Institute have shown that the more assets youth have, the less likely they are to engage in a variety of risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol or tobacco use) and the more likely they are to achieve thriving indicators (e.g., school success, delaying gratification) (Leffert, et al., 1998; Scales & Leffert, 2004; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000).

The variables within developmental systems may vary between individuals and as such pathways to adulthood may vary between individuals (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007). Although some attempts to look at the differential importance of assets by gender and ethnicity have been undertaken, though not in depth, and studies related to the applicability of the model to queer youth are not available. To summarize, a successful transition to adulthood, however defined, is shaped by numerous interacting features of the individual and her environment. However the extent of the differences and perhaps more importantly, the commonalities between the vision of growth offered by youth development and the everyday lives of LGBTQ young people are currently unknown (Llera & Katsirebas, 2010; Torkelson, 2012). Exploring these gaps is crucial to extending the reach of developmental theory and making future conversations about success and what children need to succeed more relevant to diverse groups of young people. Prior research with youth that identify as a non-dominant sexuality provides

some clues about what the relationship between queer and heterosexual development might look like.

The Transition to Adulthood among LGBTQ Youth

The markers of adulthood and factors which facilitate their achievement are likely to be relevant to most people, regardless of sexual identity. The principal difference between sexual minority youth and their heterosexual counterparts is that they are forced to negotiate compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). There is considerable evidence to suggest that traditional contexts in which young people acquire assets such as schools can become unsafe and even exert deleterious effects on development because of compulsory heterosexuality. Homophobic remarks made by students and teachers, physical abuse or harassment (GLSEN, 2011) and school policies that do not support sexual diversity are common findings in studies of LGBTQ youth in schools (Buston & Hart, 2001). These results are significant in the context of development because an unsafe school climate may deny LGBTQ young people assets such as supportive adults or a space to develop a peer social group that are important to successful development. Further, LGBTQ youth experience a higher prevalence of depression, suicidal ideation, use of illicit substances, and physical violence than their peers across contexts (Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010). Collectively, studies of the individual consequences of compulsory heterosexuality suggest that many LGBTQ youth face disproportionate developmental challenges.

Several scholars have observed that little attention has been given to mechanisms which might protect youth from or ameliorate these challenges (Busseri, Willoughby, Chalmers, & Bogaert, 2006; Saewyc, 2011; Russell, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2008; Talbert, 2004; Talbert & Rasmussen, 2010). However, very few scholars have attempted to identify developmental assets for LBGQT youth. The limited available evidence suggests that there may be similarities and differences between LBGQT development and conventional models. For example, school connectedness has been linked to better school performance (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Ueno (2005) demonstrated an association between social support from other sexual minority adolescents and protection from psychological damage due to interpersonal difficulties. Similarly, Needham and Austin (2010) found that parental support buffered gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals from a range of negative health outcomes including depression, suicidal thoughts and heavy drug use. Each of these factors, school connectedness, social support, and parental support is a developmental asset and suggests that some assets are relevant to most young people, regardless of sexual orientation. However, additional research is required to support this assertion.

Other evidence suggests that LBGQT youth may possess unique assets developed through positive adaptive responses to compulsory heterosexuality. For example, thousands of middle and high school gay straight alliance clubs have been formed in the last decade, largely through the efforts of young people themselves. Although many of these clubs encounter resistance from school boards and community members, studies have linked participation in GSAs to positive outcomes for both club

members (e.g., empowerment and engagement in democratic citizenship) and the school community (e.g., raising awareness and educating the community about LGBTQ issues: c.f., Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2003; Lee, 2002; MacGillivray, 2005; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009). Despite these findings, the relationship between conventional youth development theory and the transition to adulthood has received little direct empirical investigation (Torkelson, 2012). Further exploration of this gap may enhance the capacity of future youth development research and practice to positively impact the everyday lives of LGBTQ youth. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the transition to adulthood as it is experienced by young people that identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer.

Data Generation

Data were generated at a drop-in recreation center that serves LGBTQ youth in the southern United States (hereafter referred to as Pulse). Pulse operates primarily to deliver individual-level benefits to participants, with safety, education, and community being primary objectives. Social justice is a secondary goal of the organization, as evidenced in its work within the community to educate and advocate for LGBTQ issues. Adult leaders within the organization offer a number of activities each day and youth are free to participate at a level of engagement that suits them, or create their own activity.

This study employed an ethnographic approach to gaining insights regarding the everyday lived experiences of LGBTQ young people and viewing those experiences in a cultural context. Ethnographic techniques offer the opportunity to pursue the meaning

behind developmental experiences and to place those accounts in a cultural context (Geertz, 1973; Wolcott, 1999), which in turn allows for an intimate portrait of development. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews ($n=13$; 5 youth, 8 adults), participant observation and document review. Interviewees were recruited from an organized leisure program designed to serve LGBTQ youth. Recruitment was conducted on the basis of representing the diversity of youth attendees and adult leaders at that program in terms of age, race, and sexual orientation. Individuals were sought that occupied a range of ages in order to gain multiple perspectives on the transition to adulthood—from those currently engaged in that transition and from adults who have had time to reflect on their own development. I also kept a researcher journal in order to document my personal reactions to data generation sessions and to engage with emerging ideas.

Observations were conducted over a four month period during which I acted as a volunteer staff member. I attended program activities three days per week, with individual observation sessions lasting between two and six hours. During data generation, every type of event hosted by the program, such as drop-in recreation periods, staff meetings, and one-time events, was attended multiple times. However, I did not attend therapeutic services which were closed to non-participants. Program documents such as the staff training manual and program website were reviewed to add another layer of understanding and nuance to the data analysis. I treated my researcher journal as a data source during the analysis.

Issues of relational ethics were engaged throughout this study through meetings with key staff members of Pulse to discuss ways to ensure participant safety throughout the research process. The program director suggested that I deliver a brief presentation at the start of each drop-in recreation period that I attended during a two week period, which would allow sufficient time for word to spread that I was a researcher who would be taking notes on what I saw and heard. Each presentation would afford youth participants the opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions, and consent/decline to participate. I also engaged in other practices, such as wearing a staff nametag with the words volunteer researcher, printed on it to ensure that my role was apparent during my visits to the site. The therapeutic director also reviewed my interview questions prior to commencing interviews to address any obvious ethical issues.

Data Analysis

All data sources, interview transcripts, field notes, program documents, and the researcher journal were analyzed according to Charmaz's (2006) procedures for grounded theory. In particular, data were first subjected to alternating rounds of coding and memo-writing in which ideas generated in previous rounds were progressively clarified. Data analysis began with initial coding in which significant segments of data were labeled with a descriptive phrase. The initial codes were then sorted into categories based on a common theme. Categories were based on my interpretations of the data and were not preconceived. Twenty categories emerged at this stage, including 'community', 'identity', 'disorganization', and 'sites of debate'. Categorization was followed by a

round of memo-writing in which I explored the properties and dimensions of each category.

Next, existing codes were interrogated for their relation to either assets or markers of adulthood. Codes that bore no clear relation to either idea were discarded at this stage of analysis. Remaining codes were then refined through another round of memo-writing to further explore the internal characteristics of each category as well as the relationships between categories. Findings are presented within two categories—assets and markers of success—in order to facilitate comparisons between findings and youth development theory. The process differed somewhat from traditional grounded theory in that I endeavored to present multiple points of view on a phenomenon and highlight expected, but absent positions rather than presenting a cohesive theory. All names presented below are pseudonyms that I selected.

Findings

LBGTQ participants' experiences of markers of success and assets were largely similar to existing formulations for heterosexual youth. Education, employment, and marriage were mentioned by most participants as important markers of adulthood. Some adult participants indicated that weathering the challenges of everyday life was more significant for them during the transition to adulthood than achieving a set of pre-specified tasks, although traditional markers were still understood as important. However, normative expectations for sexual identity expression created barriers to achieving these tasks, but also exerted some positive effects on the transition to

adulthood by creating safe spaces for identity exploration. Both youth and staff that were interviewed identified a number of individual and environmental resources for development, but the most frequently discussed assets were social support, freedom of identity expression, and safety.

Markers of Success

Most participants, youth and adult alike, described traditional tasks such as education, employment, and marriage as key markers of a successful transition to adulthood. When asked, “tell me about the person you hope to be in ten years,” all of the youth participants explained that they hoped to have their education completed and a job in a field that they were passionate about. Chris, an adolescent male stated “I want to major in psychology. And so with that a few things could be done, like I could open up a private practice, you know, once I get my master’s (degree).” Ken, an adolescent male, also acknowledged the importance of education, saying that he hoped to be “in either Tokyo or Kyoto studying foreign languages for business translation” in ten years. Rick, the director of Pulse at the time of this study, explained that he facilitated group discussions with youth participants in which “having a career” was consistently identified as a developmental goal by young people.

Adult participants echoed the importance of education and careers as signposts of success, but also commented on the significance of the constellation of tasks associated with graduating college and retaining employment. For example, when asked to describe his transition to adulthood, Jonathan, an adult leader, explained, “I really feel like it was

a time of like experimenting with like life, with how to um, ya know, manage your time, work, pay your bills...” He further indicated that completing college and obtaining a job were certainly important, but also required a web of related skills such as time and money management.

Marriage and being in a committed romantic relationship were also significant to several young people. Pulse staff members held a discussion after President Obama declared his support for gay marriage. Most young people in attendance were excited about the declaration, in particular as it related to sending a broader message to the world “that gay marriage is okay”. Several youth also discussed the importance of the declaration to their own developmental goals, with comments such as, “I think it’s great because one day I will get married” being common (Fieldnote: May 9, 2012). Similarly, both youth and adult interviewees expressed the significance of romantic relationships to their development. Rick, an older self-identified gay man, noted,

“my partner is a safe place for me. I can talk about anything, I mean anything whatsoever through our relationship and know that we don’t have judgments, that we can bring those things to the table and talk about them.”

Younger interviewees likewise described a committed relationship as a key developmental goal.

Some adult interviewees indicated that development was largely a function of learning from mistakes, encountering new ways of seeing the world, and being affected by those viewpoints in addition to achieving traditional developmental markers. For example, Karen shared that her interactions with high school-aged students during her

post graduate school internship highlighted for her that she needed to let go of some of her “adolescent tendencies” and begin acting more adult-like. More specifically, she reported realizing that becoming a successful counselor and an adult required adopting a greater level of responsibility and becoming more authoritarian in her interactions with young people. Likewise, both Athena and Rick reported that they were not guided by long-term goals during their transition to adulthood as much as they were by the need to address the challenges of everyday living. Rick, for example commented that because he was so heavily involved in constructive activities in high school he was in a sense forced to live in the present so that he could balance the responsibilities he had at that time. Development for these individuals is involved addressing problems in everyday experiences and growing from those situations as well as achieving traditional developmental indicators.

Several participants, regardless of their views on markers of success, commented that identity role expectations exerted both negative and positive influences on their path to adulthood. Negative effects were discussed mostly in terms of negotiating a non-dominant sexual identity, particularly in terms of establishing romantic relationships. For example, Rick explained:

For a heterosexual teen, the process of announcing your first crush, consequently your first heartbreak, your first prom date, your first kiss, all of those things your first kiss, all of those things, those are things that are celebrated among family and on some level (laughs) expected, all of that. But, if I were to look back and say, you know the very first time that I kissed a boy which was in junior high,

actually, that was dirty...it wasn't something I could tell any of my friends. It wasn't something I could tell my mom...I didn't get to get excited about prom because I wanted to go with a guy in my high school, if I am honest. So the problem becomes, we didn't get to have those adolescent experiences growing up.

Similarly, Elaine reported that she did not come out as a lesbian until late in life because she lacked the reference points (e.g., role models, educational materials) to understand her feelings of attraction to other women. Pat, a questionably identified young adult, noted that publicly acknowledging hir sexuality identity altered interactions with hir parents. When asked to describe hir transition to adulthood, Pat stated that it was an, "instant maturation, from that point on, I raised myself. I was not kicked out...but there was certainly an emotional and parental role that ceased to exist at that point." One participant, Chris found that coming out was largely positive, reporting that "saying I'm gay was the start of my life."

Participants often managed normative expectations for sexual identity expression by 'passing' as heterosexual. Several youth and adult participants indicated that hiding their sexual identities resulted in feelings of isolation. Athena, a young adult who self-identifies as a lesbian indicated that when she realized that she was a lesbian, she "turned into" herself for a number of years and did not tell anyone about her sexual identity. She continued that although she knew that those close to her would be supportive, that she was aware of the negative images of queer people in the world and as such, "did not want to be different in that way." Similarly, Jonathan noted, "I was one of those people

that like before I was out, I didn't live a secretive gay life. I was not like participating at all...I did not kiss a guy until after I came out of the closet." Youth participants also reported that hiding their sexual identity created challenges to establishing a peer group. Michael, a self-identified gay youth participant noted,

"a lot of my guy friends who didn't know I was gay, um, of course I didn't act gay or anything like that. But I would—I just found it harder and harder to be friends with them because I always felt like I was hiding something from them."

Chris similarly reported that he kept people at a distance before publicly acknowledging his sexual identity.

Identity-role expectations also exerted productive effects on the transition to adulthood. In particular, safe spaces for identity exploration were established in response to the negative effects just discussed, such as Pulse itself. Youth participants such as Chris often referred to Pulse as a place where they "could be themselves." I observed several instances in which communities of queers came together to support one another and celebrate sexual identity. For example, I attended a pride march two consecutive summers which sought to bring together every aspect of the LBGTQ spectrum and celebrate those identities in a safe environment. The march encountered some difficulty in achieving this ideal. Johnathan stated during our interview that his interactions with wealthy donors as a fundraiser would mean that he is not welcome at the event because of the emphasis the organizers place on grassroots support. Pat likewise indicated that zi felt unwelcome at the march as a person who identifies as transgender. Zi shared,

“apparently it [inviting “trans people”] made everyone assume that gay men wanted to wear high heels.”

Developmental Assets

Findings indicated that participants experienced several individual characteristics and environmental resources as helpful in their transition to adulthood, including social support, freedom of identity expression, crisis management skills, physical and emotional safety, determination, engagement in constructive activities, and empowerment. I structure the discussion of findings according to frequency. As social support, freedom of identity expression and physical and emotional safety were the most frequently mentioned developmental assets. I devote the bulk of this section to discussing those assets. Developmental resources that were discussed less frequently, such as crisis management, are given less space.

Social Support. Most participants reported that social support was critical to their transition to adulthood. This support was often provided by immediate family members, but supportive adults and peers also emerged as significant. Adam stated during our interview that his family was important to helping him through his college experiences:

“I had parents and grandparents and stuff to catch me that time or two I like ran up my credit cards and needed help getting out of debt or something. And so I always had that support system that really let me crash and burn.”

A youth participant commented likewise that his mother, father, and grandparents are the most important people in his life because, “they, basically been with me through thick and thin.” Later in the interview, the youth clarified that his family members, “help keep me on the right track...it’s like having a net, a safety net basically.” The vast majority of interviewees in this study reported experiencing a similar support with the challenges of everyday life from their biological families.

However, a number of individuals did not find their immediate families supportive and experienced support through other adults in the community or their peers. As a female participant in her late twenties shared during our interview,

My dad worked a lot of hours and not very close to home. My mom was sort of absent, she was around but very absent, so responsibilities fell on my older brother until he moved out...I had good friends and their parents were also really supportive and kind of knew how bizarre the situation was and that helped.

Ken commented that specific staff members listened to him, which was a form of support that he did not experience in other contexts. Michael, another youth participant, noted that coming out to his parents created a distance between he and his family that necessitated seeking out that support in other places, such as school and Pulse.

Religion also emerged as an important context for social support. Rick for example discussed some of that religion provided important positive messages, such as, “...you don’t have to go to bars all the time...be around people that support you...be around people that love you.” Chris identified his “church family as an important context for social support during his transition to adulthood, even though that same religion

contributed to homophobia in his grandparents. Pat indicated that being involved in religion helped “repair some of the misconceptions I had about older white men.” In particular, he found that older white men can support and celebrate diverse sexualities. In contrast, Elaine explained that religion contributes to an idealized vision of what a person and a family is supposed to look like. She found that her understanding was marginalized by this ideal. Despite this, religion emerged as an important developmental context for a number of participants.

Like the contexts that participants experienced social support in, individual understandings of what social support is were heterogeneous. For example, a discussion on the meaning of community held during staff training yielded responses such as “family”, “Hakunnah Mattata”, “people working together”, “unity”, “people you can rely on”, and “people you enjoy being around (Fieldnote: June 10, 2012).” My field observations also demonstrated the significance of community as a source of support during tragedy. Members of the queer community across the southern United States came together to hold a candlelight vigil and make financial donations to defray the medical costs associated with the tragedy in question. When the incident was discussed during a staff meeting, Athena shared, “we [Pulse] should be a part of this because the community is coming together and it is really organic and beautiful (Fieldnote: June 28, 2012).”

Freedom of Identity Expression. As much as participants valued the support they received, most youth and staff placed a high value on the freedom to experience the

world as they saw fit. Ken, for example, valued the freedom afforded by his driver's license, car, and income from his new job as a means to independence. Notwithstanding Ken's comment, most interviewees valued a very specific type of freedom, identity expression. Several participants reported encountering socially constructed expectations for adulthood and placed a high value on being in contexts where they could resist those standards and find their own path. Elaine, an older self-identified lesbian, explained that she negotiated a set of role expectations called "the box" as an adolescent which she described as, "totally manufactured by the media and by the churches and by this idea of family and what a family is supposed to look like...that's how we were going to be. And no one cared how I felt about that." Elaine reported that her college experiences gave her the opportunity to make decisions about her identity that were at odds with 'the box', "so I got to decide who I was. And I got to figure out what I liked to do, what I didn't like and what I wanted to talk about..."

Likewise, Pat, a questionably-identified person in his late twenties discussed an image of the perfect adult, which he described as "well-adapted to the world around them that I constantly find myself at odds with." Consequently, Pat gave up on being the "perfect adult" and sought his own path. Michael discussed how college might give him the freedom to express his identity as a gay young adult without having to manage his parents' negative reactions to his sexuality. He explained that he looked forward to being in college because,

“I wish I could tell her (his mother) where I was going, like, it’s not like I don’t care or anything. But like if she knew, she would constantly go on about, you know, ‘I don’t want you going to those gay things...’”

Chris identified similar expectations placed upon his attendance of prom,

I knew a lot of kids that identified as GLBT or you know, but they—but they’re not going to go to prom because you know they can’t have a partner. They can’t bring who they want to bring, and so—they can’t be that person that they want to be.

Gender role expectations, such as ‘males attend prom with females’ deterred Chris and others he knew from attending his high school prom. He explained that the Queer Prom offered by Pulse was so important because he could bring whoever and wear whatever he wanted without fear of negative reactions from his peers. Likewise, Liza reported similarly negative experiences of gender role expectations such as the necessity of “a masculine centered person and a feminine centered person.” She continued that these norms sometimes led her to pass on some individuals as potential partners as an adolescent but attempts to live outside of these norms as an adult today. Collectively, these comments suggest that a balance between social support and independence from identity stereotypes is important for successful development.

Safety. Both youth and staff participants reported that having at least one safe space was important to successful development. Specific forms of safety that were discussed included talking, working, expressing oneself, and sharing stories without

having to fear verbal or physical abuse. The most frequently mentioned safe space was Pulse itself. For example, Rick explained that safety was the impetus for the creation of Pulse, stating “Pulse is a safe space for people that aren’t wanted.” Other staff members echoed this ideal,

I guess coming here for them is, it’s there safe space, for a lot of them who don’t have another option or who can’t be who they are outside of here for fear of being kicked out or rejected or, you know, humiliated or hurt in a multitude of ways.

Pat described a film program that zi created that was designed to enhance safety, a filmmaking club. At the end of club, the youth shared their films with one another and invited questions from the crowd at the conclusion of each film. Pat shared, “all of their answers were tied back to being able to tell their story in an environment where they didn’t have to worry about who they were in the moment.” Youth participants also self-reported feeling safe at Pulse. For instance, Michael noted that it felt “fantastic” to be in a space where he could be “openly me.”

Other Developmental Resources. Several developmental resources were mentioned by one person as being important. Rick explained that being an active member of his high school community was critical to having positive experiences as an adolescent. A staff member reported that crisis management skills were essential to negotiating her childhood. As a nine-year old tasked with the care of younger siblings and managing her household, she often had to manage challenges typically difficult for

much older adults. Michael noted that determination is an important individual characteristic to managing the challenges of becoming an adult and “staying on course.” Jonathan commented that responsibility was important to successfully navigating college. Maintaining a job through his undergraduate and graduate degrees kept him focused on his studies. Engagement in constructive activities, crisis management skills, determination, and responsibility were therefore equally important developmental resources, but less frequently mentioned by participants.

Discussion

Many of the existing assumptions of youth development theory about markers of success and developmental assets were supported in this study. Most youth and adult participants placed a high value on the achievement of traditional indicators of success such as education, employment, marriage, and involvement in a supportive romantic relationship. The importance of marriage to most young people was an interesting finding given that marriage can be a divisive issue within the queer community. For example, Warner (1999) indicated that marriage violates one of the fundamental rules of the queer movement, that non-dominant sexualities would not be judged by heterosexual standards and continued that marriage never enjoyed a broad base of support within the queer community, but was foisted upon it by high profile court cases. The small sample size and broad focus of the study (i.e., on youth development in general, rather than marriage in particular) may have prevented more diverse views on marriage from

emerging. Nonetheless, this study supports the significance of traditional markers of success within LGBTQ populations.

This study also echoed the importance of many development assets—social support, freedom of identity expression, and physical and psychological safety (Scales & Leffert, 2004). Social support has been identified in studies with queer youth as an asset to understanding and exploring LGBTQ identities (e.g., Ueno, 2005) and is a mainstay of developmental research on heterosexual youth. This study supports prior work with heterosexual youth which demonstrated that social support is important for negotiating the challenges of everyday life such as “providing a safety net” and “being there through thick and thin (Corsaro & Fingerson, 2003).” Likewise, safety has been described as a prerequisite for successful functioning in developmental settings (National Research Council, 2002). If young people do not feel safe in expressing themselves or acting within a given context, they are unlikely to have a positive developmental experience. Pulse and its activities were described by several participants as just such as a safe space. However, the need for Pulse was generated out of compulsory heterosexuality, which was also the central difference between queer and heterosexual development that emerged in the present study.

It should be noted that no participant directly cited compulsory heterosexuality as a factor in their development. However, compulsory heterosexuality stands as a useful means to discuss the diverse developmental challenges that participants experienced. Again, compulsory heterosexuality refers to the idea that heterosexuality is expected, normal, and desired and that other sexual identities ought to be sanctioned and/or

ignored. For example, Rick explained that traditional developmental experiences such as going on dates or the first kiss were something that he described as “dirty” because they conflicted with normative expectations for behavior. Many participants hid their sexuality for years in order to avoid either being labeled as different or facing sanctions. “Passing” as heterosexual created difficulties in maintaining friendships, which are themselves important developmental contexts, for several participants in this study. Compulsory heterosexuality also prompted positive responses such as creating spaces where diverse identities are supported, advocated for, and celebrated, such as Pulse and the pride march.

As such, there is a need to further discuss how compulsory heterosexuality impacts the developmental process. Diverse thinkers have offered frameworks for thinking about how power and privilege impact the social world including Foucault (1980), Rubin (1993), Butler (1990, 1993), among others. However, Amartya Sen’s (1993) capability approach seems to be particularly useful for thinking about how compulsory heterosexuality impacts the transition to adulthood. I provide a brief overview of the capability approach next and then outline its relevance to the present study.

The capability approach proposes that researchers should focus on what people are actually able to do and be (i.e., on their capabilities). Robeyns (2005) explained Sen’s approach with a processual model, each stage of which is embedded in a social context that shapes and often defines relevant concepts. The model begins with goods or services that people have reason to value, such as after-school programs. People may

encounter factors which affect their ability to translate these goods and services into capabilities. For example, personal conversion factors include individual level factors such as gender or sexual orientation, social conversion factors include norms and social policies, and environmental conversion factors such as climate or geographic location. These conversion factors then impact an individual's capabilities or set of opportunities to lead the type of life they want to lead and be the person that they want to be. Example capabilities might include the opportunity to: be part of a community, be healthy, or be gainfully employed. Individuals then face a choice of realizing their capabilities in everyday life, or achieving a valuable functioning (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1993). Consider a youth that identifies as gay within an after-school program. His ability to translate participation in that program into capabilities that he values, such as sexual identity expression, may be impacted by his sexual orientation, discriminatory program norms, and the distance that his parents drive to the program every day. Even given the capability to express his sexual identity, he still faces a choice in context of whether or not to do so.

The central contribution of the capability approach to youth development theory is the importance of thinking about the developmental opportunities that young people have in addition to achieved states of functioning. Youth development theory is most often thought of in terms of achieved states such as being educated or employed. There are many good reasons to continue to be concerned with individual achievements, not the least of which is cultivating a healthy, educated, and contributing public. However, thinking about the capabilities that individuals have to lead the type of life that they want

to lead may enhance our understanding of how compulsory heterosexuality operates in LGBTQ development. For example, if participants in this study are compared with youth in general on achieved states of functioning, very few differences would be found. Most adults and young people in this study experienced considerable social support, had at least one space that facilitated identity expression, and had a space where they felt physically and psychologically safe.

However, consideration of the opportunities participants in this study had to experience these states yields a somewhat different developmental portrait. In particular, the primary function of compulsory heterosexuality identified in this study was limiting participants' developmental opportunities. For instance, although many participants reported experiencing at least one space where they could freely express their identities, most reported that certain aspects of society, such as schools, families, the media, or general social norms were unsupportive of LGBTQ identities. As such, participants in this study may have fewer opportunities to express their identities than their heterosexual counterparts. Similarly, although many participants in this study are engaged in supportive romantic relationships, go on dates, and have had their first kiss, many also reported feeling "dirty" or the need to hide these experiences from friends and family because their attractions differed from normative expectations. Participants' opportunities to engage in conventional markers of romantic attraction were therefore attenuated. The capability approach highlights the significance of developmental opportunities to an understanding of the transition of adulthood that is more sensitive to everyday experience than if achievement alone was considered.

The capability approach also directs attention to priorities for social change to ameliorate the effects of compulsory heterosexuality. In particular, priorities for social change should include: a) enhancing the resources necessary to achieve capabilities and b) enhancing an individual's freedom to achieve the kinds of functioning that they value (Robeyns, 2005). For example, if we conceive of the capability to freely express one's identity as a capability, then creating spaces where this is possible would be an important resource to that end. Assuming the space in question is accessible and supportive of diverse identities, it may also enhance an individual's freedom to achieve desired states of functioning as well. This study also pointed to a number of additional resources that have been echoed in prior research with LGBTQ youth including spaces to develop community, to engage in social advocacy, and to learn about and explore their identities.

Advocates of the capability approach have debated the merits and challenges of developing a list of capabilities. I agree in part with Sen (2004) who has repeatedly resisted identifying a list of capabilities. In particular, the relevance of youth development theory to diverse groups should continue to be a source of discussion not only among queers, but among the public more generally. Sen (2009) hoped that such discussions would lead to the identification of ideas that are more responsive to the lives of diverse groups and provide the occasion to bring people together. Fixed lists, in contrast risk functioning as a universal standard by which all are judged without regard to differences that may emerge from race, sexual identity, culture, and other factors.

At first glance, resisting offering a list may seem to forestall progress on youth development issues. Without a clear, identifiable list of capabilities, how can policies

and youth serving organizations be designed to provide these opportunities? However, if a list of capabilities is treated as a set of principles subject to further inquiry and refinement, this risk may be avoided. That is, at some point decisions must be made about what children need in order to effect positive change in everyday situations. But the decisions need not stand as a universal signpost for successful development. If markers of success and assets are treated as provisional ideas, the risk of labeling those that do not conform to normative expectations for development as at-risk, delinquent, or deficient may be avoided (Villaruel, Montero-Sieburth, Dunbar, & Outley, 2005).

This study is limited in that the heterogeneity of the LGBTQ acronym was not done justice to in this study. LGBTQ was employed because it is the preferred acronym of Pulse and of most participants in this study, but many aspects of the queer spectrum were not included at all in this study and others, such as transgender, were only given very limited attention. On balance, this study adds to a very limited literature on markers and processes of healthy development among non-dominant sexualities. Further exploration of positive developmental processes for queer young people is a vital component of the continued effort to promote well being among non-dominant sexualities.

CHAPTER III

MANUSCRIPT 2: ORGANIZED LEISURE EXPERIENCES OF LBGTQ

YOUTH: RESISTANCE AND OPPRESSION

Introduction

My experiences as a person with a disability drew me to the work of leisure scholars interested in challenging oppression in leisure experiences (e.g., Aitchison, 2009; Allison, 2000; Anderson & Shinew, 2001; Floyd, 2007; Johnson, 1999; Mowatt, 2009). Further, I was drawn to research with youth that identify as a sexual minority because the findings of these studies resonated with, but also were different from, many of the challenges I experienced through my disability—violence, fear, and exclusion. As I engaged with the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ) literature, I found that inquiry was dominated by theoretical rationale and empirical evidence for the causes and incidence of negative experiences among LBGTQ populations (Savin-Williams, 2008; Talburt, 2004; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010). In addition, theoretical explanations for the working of oppression among LBGTQ populations have been offered by Rubin (1993) and Rich (1980), among others (e.g., Butler, 1990; 1993). For instance, Rubin (1993) argued people distinguish normal from abnormal sex through hierarchies such as heterosexual or homosexual, and married or unmarried. Classification of certain sex acts, such as homosexual sex, as deviant offers one explanation for the pervasive discrimination against LBGTQ populations.

Other researchers have documented the incidence of problem behaviors among LGBTQ, such as suicide, depression, and use of illicit substances (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & Durant, 1998; Marshal, Friedman, Stall, King, Miles, Gold, Bulkstein, & Morse, 2008; Russell & Joyner, 2001). These studies have often found that LGBTQ populations experience a higher rate of problem behaviors than their heterosexual counterparts. Documentation of problem behaviors is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to guide the creation of social policy, but it is equally important to explore the ways that LGBTQ youth resist the causes and consequences of oppression. Some progress has been made in this area. For example, gay-straight alliance clubs and internet communities have been cited as providing experiences in which sexual diversity is advocated for, celebrated and supported (Lee, 2002; MacGillivray, 2005; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009).

Scholars have also demonstrated that leisure can be a complex site of oppression and resistance. For example, researchers have investigated how LGBTQ populations confront and negotiate harmful stereotypes such as when “male basketball players date female cheerleaders.” This process functions to ignore or demean same-sex relationships as well as partnerships between individuals that do not fit into traditional male/female classifications. Findings have demonstrated that some youth that identify as a non-dominant sexuality retain positive benefits of participation in leisure despite discrimination, but many also avoid activities or prefer to participate mainly with other members of the LGBTQ community (Johnson, 1999; Kivel, 1994; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Lewis & Johnson, 2011). These adaptive responses to discrimination may

constitute resistance in the Foucaultian sense, that is, behaviors that elude the domination of oppression (Prickett, 1996).

Research with other populations has further underscored the potential of leisure as a site of resistance. For example, studies have shown that leisure settings and experiences can provide women with opportunities to engage in resistance by challenging hegemonic ideals about femininity or confronting constraints on leisure participation and practice (Shaw, 1994; 2001; Wearing, 1990; Yuen & Pedlar, 2009). However, the ways that LGBTQ youth resist oppression remain understudied. Thus, the purpose of this study was to further explore oppression and resistance in the leisure experiences of LGBTQ youth.

Theoretical Perspective

Critical humanism provided theoretical guidance for this paper. Critical humanism (Plummer, 2005) is well suited to exploring the intricacies of leisure experiences and key assumptions of this perspective had important influences on the framing of this study. Critical humanist researchers,

...start with people living their daily lives. They look at their talk, their feelings, their actions, and their bodies as they move around in social worlds and experience the constraints of history and a material world of inequalities and exclusions. (Plummer, 2005, p. 361)

In other words, critical humanists study human experience, with the recognition that everyday life is rarely neutral. People experience a range of often deeply entrenched

sources of inequality that revolve around diverse markers of difference such as social class, gender, race, and sexual identity. Each of these injustices operates in highly diverse ways—all individuals of a sexual identity do not experience the injustice of exclusion in the same way or to the same degree. The varied operation of oppression across contexts suggests that methods of resistance would likely be equally diverse. Therefore, critical humanists suggest that it is necessary to begin inquiry in experience so that the nature of oppression faced by participants can be grasped and that context-appropriate strategies of resistance can be devised.

Critical humanists also contend knowledge is always partial—situated in a time, place, and culture (Plummer, 2005). Heightened attention to social context may clarify theory-practice linkages and structures, such as language and normative expectations for behavior, that give meaning to participants' experiences (Dewey, 1931). It was therefore vital to select a methodology and analytic procedures that attended to the complexity of context.

Third, science's motive, according to critical humanists, is simply to make life better. The ultimate test of a scientific study is in its utility in practical situations (Hildebrand, 2008). Therefore, I structure the discussion below with particular attention to how my findings might be applied, not only to facilitate practical application, but also dialogue about the usefulness of this research.

Literature Review

Past research with LGBTQ youth has been dominated by a focus on the causes and consequences of oppression. Inquiry has also shown that leisure can be a complex site of both oppression and resistance to dominant ideals of sexuality, gender, and culture. However, further study of resistance by LGBTQ youth is needed to better understand ways to promote their healthy development.

Causes and Consequences of Oppression among LGBTQ Youth

Researchers have primarily documented the causes and incidence of negative experiences among LGBTQ young people. Some of this work is theoretical and explores the workings of oppression in the lives of LGBTQ populations. For example, Rubin (1993) suggested that sex acts are judged according to a hierarchal system of value, with married, reproductive heterosexual sex at the top of the hierarchy and unmarried, promiscuous, and homosexual sex near the bottom. Although homosexual acts have certainly become more acceptable over time, according to Rubin the oppression that results from occupying a lower status remains. Rich (1980) provided additional theoretical rationale for the operation of oppression in the everyday lives of individuals that identify as a non-dominant sexuality with her formulation of compulsory heterosexuality, which refers to a network of forces which compel individuals to be heterosexual. For example, legal mandates against homosexual marriage and religious doctrine that demean LGBTQ relationships are just two examples of influences that position heterosexuality as normal and desirable.

The incidence of problem behaviors constitutes another aspect of the problem focus in research with LBGTQ youth. For instance, Caldwell, Kivel, Smith, and Hayes (1998) found that gay and lesbian young adults were more likely to participate in risky activities, less likely to participate in healthy activities, and experienced higher levels of distress than their heterosexual counterparts. Russell and Joyner (2001) reported that same-sex attraction and behavior was linked to twice the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, although the vast-majority of respondents reported no suicidal ideation at all. There is also evidence to suggest that transgender persons face a disproportionate risk for suicidal attempts (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006). Similarly, results of a meta-analysis showed that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are significantly more likely to use illicit substances than their heterosexual counterparts (Marshall, Friedman, Stall, King, Miles, Gold, Bukstein, Morse, 2008). These are just a few examples from a literature which suggests that individuals that identify as non-dominant sexualities face a disproportionate risk of problem behaviors (see also, D'Augelli & Patterson, 2001; Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & Durant, 1998; Rosario, Hunter, & Gwadz, 1997).

Leisure as a Site of Resistance and Oppression

A related line of inquiry has discussed how LBGTQ youth confront and negotiate harmful stereotypes in several contexts, including leisure. For example, Kivel and Kleiber (2000) found that leisure programs participated in by LBGTQ youth facilitated affirmation of personal identity, but not social identity. That is, participants in that study felt it necessary to conceal aspects of their identity during leisure which might lead to

identifying themselves as a stigmatized population. Participants' freedom in leisure and the benefits they acquired from participation may have been attenuated as a result. Similarly, Johnson (1999) found that group enclosure (i.e., only participating with others that identify as a non-dominant sexuality) is an important element in LBGTQ leisure because it offers additional assurances of both safety and common interests. Many respondents in Johnson's research pointed out that group enclosure was a choice made to counteract sexuality-based oppression, not a natural preference. Lewis and Johnson (2011) found this can be particularly true for transgendered individuals who, in response to the perceived comfort of others, feel pressured to attend public events as their biological sex. Collectively, this body of problem focused research on LBGTQ youth has been characterized as part of a "tendency to place woundedness as a foundation of queer research" (Talbert & Rasmussen, 2010, p. 3).

Importantly, Russell (2005) has commented that the problem focus of LBGTQ research is consistent with scholarship on young people in general and therefore not limited to individuals that identify as a non-dominant sexuality. Russell (2005) also noted that the study of normative risk is important as a means to a) guide professional practice with individuals who identify as non-dominant sexualities and b) identify unique risk factors in the development of LBGTQ youth. Nonetheless, broadening the focus of research with youth that identify with a non-dominant sexuality to include resistance is critical to advancing understanding of ways to promote the well being of LBGTQ youth. One effect of normative heterosexuality is that LBGTQ youth often lack the resources, such as supportive adults, knowledge, and safe spaces to learn about their

sexuality (Warner, 1999). Resistance, in the sense of eluding domination, would refer to experiences in which such resources or safe spaces are present.

For example, LGBTQ young people have responded to oppression by forming thousands of chapters of middle and high school gay straight alliance clubs (GSA: Russell, 2002). GSAs function as spaces where young people and their allies can support one another, educate others on LGBTQ issues, and advocate for social change (Schindel, 2008). GSAs are a space in which LGBTQ youth can experience empowerment, explore their identities in a safe environment, and engage in democratic citizenship (MacGillivray, 2005; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009). Lee (2002) found a number of positive participant benefits linked to belonging to a GSA, including, increased academic performance, enhanced sense of belonging to the school community, and an increased sense of physical safety. GSAs are of course not free from the workings of oppression. Some clubs have encountered legal impediments to their formation (Burrington, 1998) as well as adverse reactions from school administrators and the local community (MacGillivray, 2005). Despite these occurrences, resistance within GSAs is important both as a means to ameliorate the effects of oppression and challenge its root causes.

Inquiry with other populations has further underscored the potential of leisure as a site of resistance. For example, Parry (2005) illustrated how leisure can be a site for resistance to pronatalist ideology (i.e., which is the theory that women's worth is principally a function of their reproductive capacities) by seeking out activities for empowerment in ways other than motherhood and avoiding activities that perpetuated

oppressive stereotypes. These findings echo earlier research by Wearing (1990) which demonstrated that women resist the notion that motherhood should be the sole focus of their time by both actively refusing certain roles and making space to pursue activities that fall outside of traditional roles of motherhood. Further, marginalized groups can learn about their identity and establish connections to broader cultural values through leisure (Yuen & Pedlar, 2009). These studies are part of a broader literature which suggests that leisure is a domain where oppressive stereotypes can be resisted (Shaw, 1994; 2001).

However, much remains to be learned about resistance in the lives of youth that identify as a non-dominant sexuality. Savin-Williams (2008) argued that there has been an,

irresistible and overpowering attention to the problematic nature of same-sex oriented populations rather than a focus on their capacities to adjust, thrive and lead exceptionally ordinary lives...Indeed, reading the clinical literature, one would be amazed that any same-sex oriented child or adolescent survives into adulthood! (p. 137)

Similarly, Russell (2005) commented that the literature on sexual minority youth more generally has been dominated by a focus on negative individual level outcomes, to the exclusion of factors which might ameliorate such issues. Knowledge of resistance is critical to engaging in research and practice that helps LGBTQ youth negotiate everyday life. Thus, there is considerable value in understanding the ways that the leisure experiences of LGBTQ youth might be oppressive, resistant, or both.

Methodology

The theoretical framework of this study necessitated selecting methods that attend to the complex, contextualized nature of everyday experience (Parry & Johnson, 2007). Experiences of oppression and resistance may vary in kind, degree, or nature among participants. I also assumed that oppression was contextualized, rooted in the normative expectations for behavior and taken for granted assumptions that structure everyday life (i.e., culture). Accordingly, I employed ethnographic techniques in this study (Fetterman, 2010), which are well suited to capture the nuances of LGBTQ youth's micro-culture, such as unique language, dress, and mannerisms. Since relatively little is known about leisure in the lives of LGBTQ youth, the complex cultural description required by ethnographic techniques (Wolcott, 1999) may function as useful scaffolding for subsequent scholarship.

Study Context

I conducted this study at an organized leisure program (hereafter called *Pulse*) in the southern United States. Pulse serves 300 LGBTQ youth per year, between the ages of 12 and 19 years old. Staff members or volunteers involved in the center were 23 or older, although some younger members, were given administrative staff positions. Pulse has been in existence for over 20 years and offers an array of leisure activities ranging from informal activities such as watching movies to more formalized therapeutic services (e.g., psychotherapeutic counseling). Youth are free to participate in activities offered on a given day at a level of engagement that suits them. Staff place a high

priority on youth ownership and leadership of Pulse as evidenced through youth involvement in event planning and staff policies for youth interactions such as “be a friend, not a parent” and “avoid giving advice unless it is asked for.” To foster involvement, youth hold positions on the board of directors and committees, and during the time I spent at Pulse, youth often initiated activities.

Policies and programming are directed at a number of core goals including, a) identity affirmation and exploration, b) empowerment, and c) social justice. Although the bulk of staff focus and attention is directed towards serving youth at the program, community change is also a key concern as shown in Pulse’s youth-led activism program as well as a community education and outreach activities.

Pulse offered an ideal context for this study because a key impetus for its formation was to serve as a vehicle for LBGTQ youth confronting oppression in their everyday lives. Pulse is designed to be a safe space where LBGTQ youth can be safe from oppression and be exposed to opportunities such as being a member of a community and have opportunities to understand their sexuality, opportunities that often are denied in other contexts.

Data Collection

I engaged in data collection for this study in two phases. The first phase lasted approximately one month in the summer of 2011 and the second phase occurred the following summer and lasted four months. Data collection during both phases occurred three days a week, with visits lasting between two and six hours. During my time on

site, I attended all available events such as drop in sessions, staff meetings, and special events.

Data for this pilot study were generated through two primary methods: participant observation and semi-structured interviews, although program documents (i.e., the volunteer handbook and program policies manual) were also reviewed. As a participant observer, I attempted to hold to Wolcott's (1999) maxim of only becoming involved to the extent needed to understand what was going on. As such, the nature of my participation shifted radically from acting as a passive observer during drop-in sessions, to acting as a volunteer staff member during the alternative prom, to being a full participant in the pride march. I composed field notes to record my experiences with young people as a participant observer—what we discussed, what we did, etc. In general, field notes were crafted on the same day as the observation session, or if this was not possible, the following day. After developing a field note, I created a separate entry in a researcher journal that documented my feelings and opinions as a participant observer. My journal entries were then used to add another layer of understanding to field experiences through data analysis.

Semi-structured, key informant interviews were also conducted with sixteen members of the Pulse community, 10 staff members and 6 youth participants. Interviewees were recruited based on the intention of gaining diverse insights on youth experiences—such as from new and veteran youth participants. Staff members added another perspective by sharing their interpretations of Pulse participants' experiences.

Interview participants ranged in age from 15 to 50. Education levels ranged from those in high school to those with completed master's degrees.

As demographic data was not collected from the individuals I interacted with but did not interview (i.e., the observation sample), specific information cannot be offered, but the general point can be made that the sample was highly diverse in terms of age (12 to 57 years) and education (middle school through master's degree).

Interview questions were developed based on the general criteria offered by Charmaz (2006) and an analysis of relevant literature. Questions were open-ended to allow fruitful lines of conversation to emerge and addressed the experiences that led individuals to attend or work at Pulse (e.g., How did you come to be involved with Pulse?, What was going on in your life then?), experiences during involvement (e.g., Walk me through a typical day at Pulse for you) and outcomes of involvement (What were some of the most important things that you have learned at Pulse). These questions provided insight into the day-to-day experiences of individuals at Pulse which was useful both in terms of gaining entry into the community and as a perspective on the Pulse culture. When issues related to oppression or resistance arose in the conversation, these responses were probed in order to generate the data below.

Interviews were conducted in person and either at Pulse or a nearby coffee shop. Interviews ranged in length from 32 to 57 minutes. Conversations were recorded using an audio tape recorder and transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through four stages which mirror the procedures for grounded theory described by Charmaz (2006). The progression through the first three stages is illustrated in Table 1 and the results of the final stage of analysis are explained in the results section. In the first stage, significant segments of data from all data sources (i.e., interview transcripts, researcher journal, field notes, and program documents) were labeled with a descriptive word or phrase. This process yielded 463 initial codes, including codes such as: serendipity, trading stories, being older, toxic people, and freedom. In the second stage, each initial code was then written onto an index card and sorted into eight tentative categories: ‘making connections’, ‘prior education and job experience’, ‘heterosexism and advocacy’, ‘program activities’, ‘job responsibilities’, ‘outcomes of employment’, ‘identity’, and ‘learning’. Each category I created was the result of my effort to create a logical grouping of codes and was not a preconceived category.

The third stage of analysis was focused coding, which “means using the most significant and or/frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data...Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Several key analytic decisions were made at this stage. In particular, the ‘identity’ and ‘heterosexism and advocacy’ categories were combined to create a new category, ‘identity as a complex, contested status’ to underscore the oppressive and resistant aspects of identity shown in the data. Also, ‘job responsibilities’, ‘freedom and constraint’, and ‘program

activities’ were combined into ‘freedom to be’ because both categories seemed to revolve around the importance and consequences of liberty. The final category, ‘deconstructing privilege’ was the result of combining ‘making connections’ and ‘outcomes of employment’. Prior education and job experience was excluded at this stage because this category did not show any clear relevance to the purpose of this study, exploring the leisure experiences of LGBTQ youth.

Table 1. Coding Progression

Initial Coding	Tentative Categories	Focused Coding	Sample Quote
Oppressed minority, privileged position	Identity Exploration	Identity as a Complex, Contested Status	“Depending on which race I am passing for, the way that people treat me changes”
Toxic people, heterosexism, gay suicide	Heterosexism and Advocacy		
Independence, help you achieve, boundaries	Freedom and Constraint	Freedom to be	“I came here because it is a safe space and without norms that safety would quickly go away”
Grant, surveys, obligation	Job responsibilities		
Activist Camp, pot luck	Program Activities		
Trading stories, family, connection	Making Connections	Deconstructing Privilege	“When I came here I had a lot of, a lot of good intentions, but I also had a lot of unexamined privilege”
Learned so much, feel good	Outcomes of Employment		
Extended program, master’s program, demoted	Prior education and job experienced	Excluded from Analysis	

The final stage of analysis was axial coding in which I returned to the original data sources to inquire into the relationships between focused codes as well as the properties and dimensions of each focused code (Charmaz, 2006). In subsequent sections

of this paper, all names are replaced with pseudonyms that I selected. Excerpts from my researcher journal and field notes appear with a label of identification and date (e.g., researcher journal: October 7, 2012). In addition, ‘participants’ refers to those who consented to participate in this study: interviewees, those I observed, and myself. In the event that clear differences emerged between groups of participants, more specific nomenclature is used, such as program staff. All names below are pseudonyms that I selected.

Findings

Three themes are explored in the following sections: identity as a complex contested status, freedom to be, and deconstructing privilege. Overall, participants experienced their identities as multifaceted, including components related to sexual orientation, race, and age. Several participants reported feeling oppressed related to one of these identity components, which functioned as a source of pain, as well as impetus for advocacy for LGBTQ issues among some young people. Identity-based oppression and resistance in turn seemed to lead most participants to place a high value on freedom of identity expression. Though these freedoms may have facilitated resistance against identity based oppression, the lack of organizational structure created serious issues such as a high turnover rate among staff, which challenged the efforts of program staff to reach the goals of Pulse. Despite these challenges, Pulse experienced success related to oppression and resistance by creating space to deconstruct privilege which in turn, fostered greater understanding of oppression and privilege for several of the participants.

Identity as a Complex, Contested Status

Several participants experienced their identities as multifaceted sites of both oppression and resistance. The following discussion among staff members illustrates the complexity of queer identities,

The first individual explains that she identifies as queer for different reasons than a lot of people, but never explained what those reasons were. The person immediately to her left added that he likes the word queer because it captures the fact that he is searching for a way to identify. Someone asked if queer can be a rejection of heterosexism and Hope answered in the affirmative. Someone else explained that he deploys queer as an acceptance strategy. He says that although he is bisexual he identifies as queer to fit in with both his straight and gay friends. (Field note: June 12, 2011)

The above quote demonstrates that sexual identity can mean very different things to different people. Similarly, observations underscored the diversity of sexual identity performances. Youth often switched their preferred gender pronouns, preferring to identify as female one day and gender neutral the next, and sometimes invented their own pronouns (e.g., dee/dan for the name Dan). This complexity was also evident in participant's experiences of oppression and resistance.

Most participants reported experiencing oppression related to their sexual identity, which manifested as both a lack of resources and social connection. One volunteer shared his experiences growing up in a very small town and being the only

openly gay youth resident. He said that his father helped him look for a youth program where he could connect with other queer youth and they found Pulse (Fieldnote: May 21, 2011). Later that same day, I met a volunteer who said that he would have “killed” for a place like Pulse when he was younger so that he could resolve the questions he had about his sexual identity. Several youth participants reported during interviews that homophobia is an expected part of their everyday lives. For example, one youth noted, “...but in being a gay person, that’s [homophobia] also something that you understand and you expect to happen, and you prepare yourself for it as well..”

Through my involvement at Pulse, I realized that sexual identity was an important source of pride, in addition to being a source of pain and exclusion, at the Queer Prom that Pulse hosted. In processing the event, I wrote, “they dance, they kiss, they talk to their friends. They are teenagers and this is a place where they can be free” (Researcher Journal: May 21, 2011). Pulse also hosted a local Gay-Straight Alliance chapter in which queer young people and straight allies worked towards social justice for LBGTQ youth. For several youth members of this GSA, identity was a source of pride and an impetus for social advocacy. One youth participant discussed how her involvement in the GSA served as a catalyst for activism, “...it sort of opened my eyes and ears to the ways that oppressions worked together and I think it was one of those things, once you hear it, you can’t unheard it.”

Racial issues also emerged in the efforts of Pulse to develop an inclusive LBGTQ community. For instance, Sarah, a youth participant, reported an acute awareness of the privileges that her white and Hispanic identities afforded her and attempted to pass as

one or the other accordingly. In contrast, another young person shared with me that “being black and gay is like having two strikes against me” during an observation session. Race therefore operated as a source of privilege and oppression for individual participants in this study, in addition to being a divisive issue within Pulse. In particular, Hope, one of the founders of Pulse, expressed concern that Pulse is largely attended to by young people that identify as Caucasian (Field note: May 24, 2011). My observations echoed her concern in that on the rare occasions racially diverse young people attended Pulse, they rarely returned. Nonetheless, Hope shared during our interview that she created Pulse precisely to remedy some of the effects of the injustices that several participants enumerated, “the bottom line of this place is safety—physical and emotional.”

Age also operated as an important identity category at Pulse in that participants’ experiences were at least partially defined by chronological age (e.g., youth versus staff members, age at which participants are able to attend Pulse, etc.). Experiences in which age was significant contained elements of both resistance and oppression. Many staff expressed that the lines between youth and staff were perhaps less clear than was the case in other youth-serving organizations. A senior staff member indicated during an informal conversation that staffers attempted to function as a resource within a youth-controlled environment,

Um, youth involvement looks and sounds like um, you know, older adults just taking a step back, taking orders, if you will. You know, just being, being there if

they need this. “Hey, can you, you know, we’re doing this, can you go to the store for us,” ...

On the other hand, the issue of ‘aging out’ was highly contentious and a frequent topic of conversation among youth at drop-in recreation periods. At 19 years of age, young people ‘age out’ of the program and cannot return until they are 25, at which time they may be an employee. ‘Aging out’ was so contentious in part because many young people experienced a deep connection to Pulse and did not want to leave, but also because they would experience a gap in service within the community during that time period. As such, age served as a point of resistance to an adult-led U.S. culture on the one hand and a constraint to receiving social services on the other.

Freedom to Be

Perhaps because of the experience of identity-based oppression, freedom of identity expression carried a tremendous weight among several participants. Many queer young adults experience sanctions for not conforming to mainstream norms of dress and behavior. For example, one young person stated, “when I came out, I lost everyone.” Publicly acknowledging his sexual identity terminated many significant relationships in his life, including many with family members. Once in a space where these young people had the ability to express themselves, that freedom seemed to become very important. My experiences at the pride march further underscored the importance of freedom of expression,

The range of dress I see is simply massive. I see S&M gear, various stages of nudity, bathing suits, wigs, thongs, corsets, dresses, and lots of makeup. Most people seemed so excited while marching—screaming, dancing, kissing, chanting, holding hands, clapping, and smiling. (Fieldnote: May 3, 2011)

Informal conversations with youth marchers from Pulse revealed that some attendees experienced a similar freedom of expression at the pride march. One young person reported that the march facilitates the rise of “the hidden community of gays.” Another youth stated that this was a place where he could “be whoever he wanted.” I felt free as well, despite my multiple privileged identities (e.g., high education, high socioeconomic status, white, heterosexual)—later in the conversation I said, “that is the great thing about the pride march, you can do whatever the hell you want.” (Fieldnote: May 3, 2011)

Brittany explained during our interview that the freedoms prized at the pride march were equally significant to the day-to-day operations of Pulse. In particular, she described the program as, “a place to sit and hold hands with who they [the youth] wanna hold hands with.” Young people at Pulse seemed to value most using the space in a way that made them feel comfortable. I observed that many young people preferred to use the space as a place to hang out with their friends, watch movies, without feeling the need to take a leadership role in activities or program design. For example, volunteers often asked youth if they had any program ideas and youth often responded, “no, I’m just here to hang out.” One youth responded that he came to Pulse because, “this is a place where people aren’t dicks basically” (Fieldnote: May 21, 2011), seemingly

echoing Brittany's observation. A small number of youth opted to use Pulse to become involved in program leadership, such as by joining the board of directors or the prom planning committee.

Freedom of identity expression may have been both constrained and facilitated by the fact that Pulse was unstructured. For instance, I helped Pulse staffers set up for the Queer Prom, many of whom, including myself, lacked a clear understanding of ways that they could contribute to the set up as shown in the following excerpt from my field notes,

An uncomfortably friendly individual joined the fray and asks if there is anything he can do to help. I explain that we don't even really know what we are doing—we are just sort of winging it. He says, "great", because he does not know what to do either. (Fieldnote: May 21, 2011)

As Hope explained during staff training, our experience of role uncertainty was endemic to Pulse, "although human resources is our most valuable resource, it is also our least organized" (Fieldnote: June 12, 2011). The absence of a well-organized group of staff may have constrained the efforts of people within Pulse to resist oppression. In particular, if staff were working together toward a common goal, resistance may have been more successful than was actually the case. Brittany also commented that this sense of disorganization contributed to a high turnover rate among staff, which may have forestalled the process described in the final category, deconstructing privilege.

Deconstructing Privilege

Findings showed that Pulse provided a place for several participants to think critically about how the privilege in their lives supports and/or resists the oppression of others. Sarah stated during our interview that “when I came here, I had a lot of good intentions, but I also had a lot of unexamined privilege and a lot of, ya know, my opinion is the best opinion.” She later continued that deconstructing her privilege made her more willing to be affected by the viewpoints of those around her. My own experiences at Pulse paralleled Sarah’s in some respects. As a seven-year summer camp veteran and being educated in leisure studies for nearly a decade, I felt that I would have a good understanding of what ought to be happening. On my first day, Hope threw me a copy of *Out* magazine and said “start reading.” I immediately felt uncomfortable at the sight of nearly naked men, a feeling which was magnified a few moments later when two transgendered youth sat down on the couch next to me and started making out. Both occurrences seemed wildly inappropriate—recreation programs are not a place for this, right? Yet it is precisely opportunities such as this that are denied LGBTQ youth in other contexts, to as Brittany put it, “hold hands with who they wanna hold hands with.” In attempting to deconstruct my own privilege, I failed to consider the situational aspects of power, whereby traditionally advantaged groups may find themselves in positions of subordination and vice versa.

Brittany also expressed concern during our interview that the term ‘volunteer’ was laden with privilege in that she was free to engage with Pulse in the manner that best

suiting her own needs. She later commented that she attempts to resist this privilege by reaching out to other staff members in hopes of finding new ways to contribute.

Critically engaging with how the privilege that Sarah, Brittany and I experienced comingled with our interest in creating space for resistance was a crucial learning outcome for future engagement in social justice projects. However, this learning was largely undertaken via private self reflection. Group discussions at Pulse about the privileges that various individuals experience may have further enhanced our growth in that regard.

Discussion

In summary, participants experienced their identities as complex sites of both oppression and resistance. The workings of power underscored the importance of freedom of identity expression. However, the fact that Pulse was unstructured may have contributed to issues of role uncertainty and turnover among staff that may have created barriers to the efforts of youth to resist oppression. Despite this, several participants reported that Pulse provided the occasion to deconstruct sources of privilege in their lives, which in turn may have enhanced the capacity of the Pulse community to engage in resistance.

This study demonstrated that experience often contains elements of resistance and oppression simultaneously. Findings illustrated that participants engaged in several acts of resistance against heterosexist forces which might render LGBTQ persons invisible or deficient. However, further analysis of the pride march illustrates the

multifaceted nature of oppression and existence. The pride march constituted Foucaultian resistance in that the event served to share and celebrate the experiences of marginalized people (Prickett, 1996). That is, the pride march was a display of the heterogeneity of 'LGBTQ,' making known the infinite array of identities that do not fit within the heterosexual classification. These queer performances further exposed the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy at the heart of heterosexist thinking as false. On the other hand, Johnston (2007) indicated that participants may experience shame during the march, such as by feeling the need to disguise themselves at a risk of being recognized by people they are not out to. To the extent this was the case, some of the resistive force of the pride march may have been attenuated.

The pride march also exposed issues of power, such as a lack of basic social services for LGBTQ populations, which contribute to the need for a pride march in the first place. Critical understanding of the ways these forces operate is critical to effective resistance. However, several writers have argued that LGBTQ marches contain their own internal dynamics which marginalize some non-dominant sexualities as 'less socially acceptable' than others (Warner, 1999; Vaid, 1995). In this way, the pride march may have functioned both as resistance to heterosexism, while also being oppressive to some segments of the LGBTQ community. Consideration of how experience may function as both resistance and oppression, alternately as one or the other, or as a dynamic process (Butsch, 2001) may allow scholars to more clearly grasp the oppressions at work in participants' lives and hence, enhance the possibilities for social change.

Butsch (2001) demonstrated the importance of understanding resistance as a dynamic process. Acts of resistance sometimes generate responses from the dominant culture which in turn demand consideration by the marginalized group and so on. For example, LGBTQ culture has been subject to commodification such as the growth of restaurants, bars, clubs and coffee shops that serve non-dominant sexualities.

Commodification has generated both positive and negative effects. Sears (2005) noted that, “intensified commodification, then, has contributed to the development of spaces of open gay and lesbian existence” (p.104). However, spaces for community based on commodities exclude those that do not have the ability to pay. Although I do not explore dominant responses to resistance in the present study, studying resistance as a dynamic process may allow scholars to better understand the efficacy of specific resistive acts and strategically design future studies in response.

This study also raised the issue of exploring single versus multiple identities in resistance research. Resistance studies that focus a single identity category offer the advantage of being able to ‘name the enemy’. More specifically, authors of single identity studies often deploy these constructions strategically in order to expose the complexity or challenge the normativity of identity categories (Grace, Hill, Johnson, & Lewis, 2004). In these cases, treating identity as one dimensional can be useful. For instance, Shaw (2006) explained that the bulk of resistance research has focused on gender ideologies, particularly the ways that women challenge hegemonic ideals about femininity or confront constraints on leisure participation and practice (e.g., Green, 1998; Shaw, 1994; Wearing, 1990).

However, single identity studies may not be as sensitive to what is happening in participant's everyday lives as efforts to consider multiple identities (McCall, 2005). Sen (2006) argued that individuals do not engage with the world according to "some singular and overarching system of partitioning" (p. xii). For example, a number of my identities, including my adult, researcher, and 'person with a disability' identities, emerged as significant in the course of my work with Pulse. In some cases, these statuses worked with each other to magnify outcomes, such as when my status as an adult created unease in seeing youth making out that was magnified by the general aversion to social interaction I experienced as part of my disability. In other cases, my identities conflicted such as when my identity as a social justice researcher conflicted with my desire to remain a passive observer at Pulse events.

Therefore, a myopic focus on a singular identity category may obscure the ways that identity categories can work together to redouble the effects of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Likewise, Nash (2008) commented that resistance scholarship must also document the ways that identities can function as sources of privilege or even alternately as both oppressed and privileged. For example, LGBTQ young people may find themselves oppressed in many situations. However, when the two transgender young people started making out on the couch it was clear, despite my multiple, privileged identities that Pulse was their space, not mine. Attending to the complexity of oppression and privilege in lived experience is critical to crafting studies of resistance that are faithful representations of lived experience.

Intersectionality is not without its critics. For example, if, as Crenshaw (1991) argued, the experience of gender oppression can be made radically different by considering race as well (and so on with regard to other identities), this seems to challenge the possibility of making progress on social justice issues. Indeed, proponents of intersectionality have suggested that social life *can* be infinitely more complex than generally assumed by social scientists (Davis, 2008). However, questions of which identities matter most (and how much) and how they are related to one another are ultimately to be resolved within specific study contexts in order to respect local differences in experience. For instance, sexuality was perhaps the most important status in this study, but my interview with Sarah revealed that an exploration of race as well may have facilitated greater understanding of participant's everyday experiences. The challenge for researchers is to recognize that people engage with the world through multiple identities and to explore which are most useful to the phenomenon of interest.

Further, the deployment of intersectionality also increases sensitivity to sameness and as such opens new and radical possibilities for connection. My own constraints to expressing my identity as an individual that stutters resulted in a common ground between myself and members of the Pulse community that experienced sexuality based oppression. Although our experiences were very different, the common ground that we shared—exclusion, isolation, and fear of expression—led to the strongest sense of belonging that I have felt in years. My hope is that leisure can serve as space where similar connections can be fostered among diverse oppressed people. Intersectionality

opens up the extent of our diversity and sameness to investigation and in so doing is vital to advancing social justice projects (Sen, 2009).

Participant's experiences also have implications for leisure practice. Results demonstrated that freedom of identity expression was one of the important successes that Pulse achieved. However, the fact that these expressions occurred in an unstructured environment led to role uncertainty and sometimes short term employment among staff. Research has consistently shown that longer relationships between youth and staff are linked to stronger outcomes (National Research Council, 2002); thus, the lack of structure at Pulse may have negatively impacted youth experiences to some degree. Similarly, studies of youth development have also shown that unstructured youth programs are linked to a higher incidence of problem behaviors (Mahoney, Stattin, & Magnusson, 2001). As such, this study points to a need to balance individual freedoms with a structured programmatic environment.

Dewey's notion of positive freedom may be useful in exploring the interplay of structure and agency in youth settings (Pappas, 2008). Pappas wrote that "positive freedom is the capacity of an individual to carry out a course of action" (p. 221). That is, identity expression is not simply a matter of removing external constraints, but also requires providing information about non-dominant sexualities and supportive role models. If employees lack a clear understanding of how their role fits into the broader programmatic mission, achievement of such ends is less likely. Further, a high turnover rate may have created challenges to young people forming supportive relationships with adult leaders at Pulse. Therefore, investigating ways to honor the importance of

individual identity expression, while at the same time providing a supportive space for that to occur may be crucial to designing effective social justice programs and leisure opportunities.

Finally, my experiences at Pulse yielded important learning about the need for leisure researchers and practitioners to unpack their assumptions about young people.

Lashua (2011) explained:

...we must be careful that hopeful idealism does not blind us to the everyday personal and political struggles in young people's lives. If, in our professional zeal, we suppress the nature of the danger, we risk providing leisure services that are yet another form of violence, oppression and injustice toward young people.

(p. 73)

Researchers working for social justice enter the field with a host of assumptions about participants such as which of their identities is most important in a given situation and the types of oppression they are likely to experience. We must unpack these assumptions and see how they align with participants' everyday lives because uncritical application of past work risks masking participants' experiences, limiting the potential of our scholarship to resist oppression, or committing a form of violence on already marginalized people. For example, I entered the field with assumptions about how my disability would be received (badly) and the impossibility of forming meaningful connections with LGBTQ young people as a heterosexual male. A month of data collection showed that my assumptions downplayed the radical acceptance Pulse offered:

Today, my speech was bad. As I delivered my IRB-approved spiel of why I was there, I stuttered on nearly every word. The paragraph-long speech felt like it took ten minutes. I could feel my face getting flushed, my shirt dampening with sweat. My eyes were locked on the aging hardwood floor for as long as I could stand, and when I looked up there was not even a hint of discomfort among the youth—no laughter, no jokes, it was as if someone had shared the weather forecast. When I looked up a young person shared that he would love to talk to me about my project when I get a minute. I am home. (Researcher Journal, 7, 1, 2011)

I began to understand of oppression and resistance at Pulse after that day. A world that previously seemed so foreign began to come into focus once I considered how the oppressions and points of resistance in my own life interacted with the experiences of Pulse participants and staff. Future research may benefit from similar understanding and connection that may result from exploring researcher subjectivity.

CHAPTER IV

MANUSCRIPT 3: FEATURES OF POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL SETTINGS

FOR LBGTQ YOUTH

Introduction

Research with Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ) youth has primarily focused on theoretical explorations of oppression and empirical studies of problem behaviors (Saewyc, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2008). Several scholars have offered theoretical rationale for the oppression in the everyday lives of non-dominant sexualities (e.g., Butler, 1990; 1993; Rubin 1993). For example, Rich (1980) offered compulsory heterosexuality which refers to a network of forces that compel individuals to identify as heterosexual. Some religions promote marriage as a monogamous, reproductive relationship between a man and a woman (Cobb, 2005). Sex education classes paint a similar portrait of sexuality and often demean queer sex, if it is discussed at all (Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers, Summers, & Schlieffer, 2006). Further, many young adults that identify as a non-dominant sexuality face harassment and bullying for failing to conform to normative expectations for sexual identity expression (GLSEN, 2011). These are just a few examples of a network of forces that position heterosexuality as normal, natural, and desired and correspondingly demean or ignore non-dominant sexual identities.

Researchers have also directed considerable attention to documenting the incidence of problem-behaviors among LBGTQ youth. In general, these studies have shown that youth face a disproportionate risk of undertaking a range of negative

behaviors including drug use, suicidal ideation, and depression (see Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010 for a review). Research has also indicated that LBGTQ youth often experience traditional developmental contexts such as families, schools, and leisure as unsupportive, even deleterious. Collectively these studies indicate that queer young people face considerable challenges on the road to becoming successful adults. However, few scholars have explored mechanisms to promote the adoption of positive knowledge, skills, and attitudes that might facilitate a successful transition to adulthood among LBGTQ youth (Russell, 2005).

Organized leisure programs could be important developmental contexts for LBGTQ youth, given the numerous positive outcomes associated with participation for heterosexual populations (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005), although few researchers have examined organized leisure programs with LBGTQ youth to date (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009). An important aspect of realizing the potential of organized leisure programs to serve LBGTQ youth is to identify features of experiences that promote positive developmental outcomes. The National Research Council (2002) summarized much of the relevant literature with their provisional list of eight features of healthy developmental settings (a) physical and psychological safety; (b) appropriate structure; (c) supportive relationships; (d) opportunities to belong; (e) positive social norms; (f) support for efficacy and mattering; (g) opportunities for skills building, and integration of family, school, and community efforts.

However, these propositions have yet to be explored among non-dominant sexualities. Although it stands to reason that much extant programming knowledge

would be highly relevant to any young person regardless of sexual identity, the fact that queer youth must contend with institutional discrimination suggests that programming considerations for LGBTQ populations may differ somewhat from their heterosexual counterparts. Exploration of the similarities and differences between current programming knowledge and best practices among organizations that serve LGBTQ youth may enhance understanding of how to design positive developmental experiences for non-dominant sexualities. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore the National Research Council's (2002) features of positive developmental settings framework in the context of an organized leisure program designed to serve LGBTQ youth.

Background

I begin by reviewing the literature on developmental supports for queer youth through the National Research Council's (2002) features of positive developmental settings framework. As shown in Table 2, the National Research Council's (2002) framework contains eight features including physical and psychological safety, appropriate structure, and supportive relationships. The available evidence seems to indicate that these eight features are highly relevant to the everyday lives of queer young people, although the fact these youth identify as a non-dominant sexuality may create unique demands for implementing these ideas in programmatic settings.

Table 2. Features of Positive Developmental Settings (National Research Council, 2002).

Feature	Example Descriptors
Physical and Psychological Safety	Violence-free facilities; health promoting facilities
Appropriate Structure	Clear and consistent rules; Developmentally appropriate structure
Supportive Relationships	Responsiveness of adults to adolescent's needs
Opportunities to Belong	Opportunities for meaningful inclusion
Positive Social Norms	Expectations for behavior
Support for Efficacy and Mattering	Youth-centered programming; strategies to empower young people
Opportunities for Skill Building	Opportunities to learn relevant life skills and prepare for adult roles
Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts	Multiple contexts working towards a common goal in enhancing the well being of youth

Safety

Safety forms the foundation for positive developmental experiences in organized leisure programs. If young people are concerned for their safety, they are unlikely to continue to participate, much less accrue any positive benefits from the experience. Several studies have underscored that both physical and psychological safety are vital considerations for LBGTQ youth across contexts, including leisure. For example, research in school settings has shown that many youth that identify as a non-dominant sexuality face consistent physical and verbal harassment related to their sexual identity (GLSEN, 2011). Some youth respond by attempting to 'pass' as heterosexual or by only engaging in leisure activities with other individuals that identify as LBGTQ. For instance, Kivel and Kleiber (2000) found that lesbian and gay youth concealed aspects of their identity during leisure which might have identified themselves as members of a

stigmatized population. Similarly, Johnson (1999) found that group enclosure is an important element in LGBTQ leisure because it offers additional assurances of both safety and common interests. Many respondents in Johnson's research pointed out that group enclosure was a choice made to counteract heterosexism, not a natural preference. It is important to point out that creating safe spaces is not a matter of contrasting queer and heterosexual spaces, but of identifying characteristics of youth services that are supportive of *all* young people. Past research indicates that such characteristics are at least partially captured in the remaining seven features, such as providing appropriate structure.

Appropriate Structure

Most young people stand to benefit from structured environments, regardless of sexuality. Consistently enforced rules have been linked with positive developmental experiences (National Research Council, 2002) while participation in unstructured spaces has been linked with the adoption of risky behavior (Mahoney, Stattin, & Magnusson, 2001). A key consideration in programming for non-dominant sexualities is ensuring that rules and policies are in place that explicitly oppose sexuality-based discrimination (Johnson, 2003). Important places for anti-discrimination policies to be in place include mission statements, staff training manuals, anti-bullying rules, and procedures for campers that disclose their sexual identity (Mayo, 2003).

Although few studies are available which examine the implementation of anti-harassment policies in schools (Hansen, 2007) or elsewhere, the presence of an anti-

harassment policy was indirectly linked to feelings of safety among transgender youth in at least one study (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). The presence of supportive policy may be an important step toward crafting positive developmental experiences, but the success of such an initiative may depend heavily on its adoption on the social context in which it is enforced.

Supportive Relationships

Several studies have indicated that social support can play an important, protective role for LGBTQ youth. For example, McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell (2010) found that attachment to adults by transgender youth in middle and high school was linked with both increased safety and enhanced academic performance. Anderson's (1998) study of gay male youth demonstrated a positive association between the presence of gay, lesbian, and bisexual social support and self-esteem. Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub (2009) conducted interviews with 15 members of gay straight alliance clubs and found that membership provided the occasion for interpersonal empowerment, or relationships with peers that provided a sense of mutual understanding and alleviated isolation. Other researchers have found links between social support and increased school performance (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001) as well as protection from psychological damage (Ueno, 2005), depression, suicidal thoughts, and heavy drug use (Needham & Austin, 2010).

The key difference between social support for heterosexual and queer young people is that LGBTQ youth must manage the negative reactions of peers, family

members, and others to their sexual identity. For instance, participants in one study reported feeling socially isolated from individuals that they disclosed their sexual identity to, although some did report positive reactions (Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). A number of studies have shown similar results. Although many LGBTQ young people disclose their sexual identity and receive love and support, there is a very real risk of verbal or physical abuse during sexual identity disclosure (D'Augelli, Hersberger, Pilkington, 1998). However, most parents eventually come around to acceptance (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Mufioz-Plaza and colleagues recommended engaging in practices to enhance awareness of and sensitivity of school communities to LGBTQ issues to increase the potential for social support, such as supporting queer teachers so that they might stand as visible role models. Enhancing awareness and understanding may also provide additional opportunities for queer youth to experience belongingness.

Opportunities to Belong

Opportunities to belong are critical for all young people as they explore their individual identities and how they fit into larger communities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Queer youth are faced with the added challenge of managing their identity presentation in discriminatory environments. For example, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) indicated that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth often engage in a process of visibility management in school, which refers to a

dynamic, ongoing process by which GLB youth make careful, planned decisions about whether they will disclose their sexual orientation, and, if they decide to disclose, to whom and how they disclose, and how they continue to monitor the presentation of their sexual orientation in different environments. (p. 233)

Visibility management was engaged as a strategy to avoid abuse and harassment (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003), but passing as heterosexual may create challenges in developing honest friendships or gaining support from the queer community. Accordingly, practitioners must continue to think about how organized leisure programs can provide opportunities to belong to LBGTQ youth.

In order for programming staff to provide opportunities for identity development, staffers must be educated on LBGTQ issues. Writers have suggested that staff take stock of what they know and their assumptions about sexual minorities. For example, Holder (2011) indicated that staff must be aware that there is no necessary connection between biological gender, gender identity, and sexual attraction. An individual may be born a male, identify as female, and be attracted to those that identify as male, regardless of biological gender. One implication of this for recreation practitioners is that transgender youth may exhibit gender non-conforming behaviors such as preferring activities not typically associated with their biological gender (Grossman, O'Connell, & D'Augelli, 2005). Further, gender identity is a fluid construct (Butler, 1990). A young person may display typically masculine characteristics one day, feminine the next, and both simultaneously the day after. Staff must ensure that these choices are made in a climate

where diversity is supported and celebrated so that gender non-conforming decisions are not met with abuse or harassment.

Positive Social Norms

Social norms set the relational context for developmental experiences.

Practitioners need to think about how normative expectations in programs support, celebrate, ignore or demean queer youth participants. Ideals of tolerance and inclusion have infused youth recreation for decades, but Johnson (2003) suggested that recreation ought to be positioned as a context in which difference can be celebrated. An important part of the effort to celebrate sexual difference is thinking about and changing program norms that favor heterosexuality. For example, leisure programs sometimes allow stereotypes such as “gay men are weak” to be perpetuated through inappropriate language (Caudwell, 2006; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000). Addressing such issues requires active prohibition of derogatory comments but also the promotion of more respectful language. For instance, Mayo (2003) suggested that the term partner, in place of girlfriend or boyfriend allows youth is more respectful of diverse partnerships. The challenge for practitioners is to identify these and other heterosexual assumptions and work to replace them with more respectful norms (Johnson, 2003).

Support for Efficacy and Mattering

The notion that high quality youth programs involve youth in decision making according to their ability level is well supported in the youth development literature

(Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Borden, 2005). Likewise, social advocacy and civic engagement have strong roots in the queer community (Vaid, 1995; Warner, 1999). For example, thousands of youth-led gay-straight alliances exist in middle and high schools throughout the United States (Russell, 2002). Young people in these clubs support one another, educate their school community on queer issues, and engage in social advocacy. The latest GLSEN (2011) school climate survey indicated that students in schools with a GSA reported less victimization and felt safer than their counterparts in schools that did not have a GSA. Walls, Kane, & Wisneski (2009) reported that the presence of a GSA may be linked with subjective feelings of safety and perceived access to adult allies. More generally, scholars have linked participation in GSAs to individual level benefits such as empowerment and school level outcomes such as raising awareness of LGBTQ issues (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2003; Lee, 2002; MacGillivray, 2005; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009). The evidence provided by authors of GSA studies suggests that programmers have much to gain from offering similar opportunities in organized leisure programs.

Opportunities for Skill Building

Leisure services for youth are often touted as important spaces to build life skills. Queer and heterosexual youth stand to benefit from many of the same skills such as interviewing, teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership to name just a few. One key point of difference is that LGBTQ young people do not have the same level of access to identity-related knowledge as their heterosexual counterparts. For example, a national

study of sex education programs indicated that queer sex was rarely discussed and was often engaged in relation to a negative topic on its appearances (Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers, Summers, & Schlieffer, 2006).

Informal mechanisms of information transmission are also lacking. For instance, studies have shown that LBGTQ individuals experience a lack of accessible role models (Bird, Kuhns, & Garofalo, 2012), barriers in access to school clubs (Burrington, 1998), and few spaces in which to develop community (Warner, 1999). In the absence of these resources, queer youth face significant challenges to understanding their sexual identity and how they fit into broader LBGTQ communities. Programmers can play a number of roles in filling this gap such as actively seeking out employees that identify as a non-dominant sexuality, familiarizing themselves with avenues of support within the community, or providing such resources within their programs.

Coordination of School, Family, and Community Efforts

Finally, if multiple sectors of queer young people's lives work together to identify and challenge injustice, the everyday lives of LBGTQ youth will be improved. For example, the Massachusetts Safe Schools program is a state-mandated initiative to promote support and safety for sexual minority youth in schools and to enhance majority understanding of queer issues. The program began with an executive order from the Governor to create a commission to explore the school experiences of gay and lesbian youth. The state board of education then established the safe schools program to implement the program. Although the implementation of the safe school program varied

across individual schools, Szalacha (2003) reported that every implementation measure was positively associated with an improved sexual diversity climate. Key elements of the success of the safe schools program include the fact that it was initiated at the state level, supported by the community surrounding individual schools, included resources such as diversity training for teachers (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Szalacha, 2003). Although studies of the implementation of multilevel initiatives such as the Massachusetts program are rare, this study echoes the idea that coordinating multiple ecologies stands to enhance the well being of young people (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). However, this and each of the above propositions requires empirical testing to enhance our understanding of what positive developmental settings for LGBTQ youth might look like (National Research Council, 2002).

Methodology

Study Context

I gathered data for this study at an organized leisure program designed to serve LGBTQ youth and their heterosexual allies, henceforth referred to as Pulse. The program is situated in the southern United States and serves approximately 300 young people between the ages of 12 and 19 per year. Pulse's central goal is to provide a safe space for LGBTQ youth and their allies. Within that safe space, staffers also seek to provide social services to participants such as resources for identity exploration and life skills (e.g., resume building). Social justice is a tertiary goal of the organization. Pulse staff members try to educate the community about and advocate for queer issues, in

addition to the gay-straight alliance chapter that is housed within Pulse. These goals are pursued by volunteer and paid staff members, all of whom are over the age of 25.

Pulse principally operates as a drop-in recreation center in that the bulk of Pulse's programming is unstructured. Young people primarily 'hang out' at Pulse—converse with their friends, watch movies, play board games, and listen to music. Structured activities are typically offered at the rate of about one per day and include discussion groups on both specific (e.g., transgender support group) and general (e.g., forums to discuss whatever is on your mind) topics, sex education classes, life skills lessons, and therapeutic services. Pulse also sponsors an array of larger-scale annual events such as a Queer Prom, pride march, and graduation celebration.

Leadership of Pulse is shared by youth participants and adult staff members. Adults set the goals of the organization and take on the bulk of the responsibility for organizing and delivering structured activities. However, input from young people on both what activities should be offered and how these services might be delivered was often acted upon during my tenure on site. In addition to bearing some responsibility for planning activities, youth were free to construct their experiences at Pulse as they saw fit. For example, when structured activities were offered young people always had a choice to participate and could do so at a level of engagement that suited them. Alternatively, youth were encouraged to initiate their own activities if they preferred. Youth were also encouraged to take physical ownership of Pulse. Several walls were designed by youth participants and most walls contained at least some artwork that was designed by current or former attendees.

Data Generation

I employed ethnographic techniques to investigate positive developmental features within Pulse (Wolcott, 1999). Data were generated through three primary methods, observations, interviews and document review. Overall I spent approximately four months as a participant observer at Pulse. My visits generally lasted between two and six hours and occurred three days per week. I was a volunteer staff member for the duration of my involvement with Pulse, bearing similar responsibilities (e.g., creating a safe environment for youth) and engaging in activities (e.g., attending staff meetings, cleaning, setting up, playing) very similar to other volunteers. After each observation session, I endeavored to craft a field note that described my experience—what I did, what I saw, etc.—on the same day, but sometimes wrote the following day if this was not possible. I also kept a researcher journal in order to add another layer of nuance to the analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with participants, volunteers, and staff members. Interview participants were recruited based on the objective of painting as diverse a portrait of Pulse as possible. In particular, I sought input from new and returning youth participants as well as volunteers and individuals at every level of leadership within the organization. All interviews ($n = 13$; 5 youth, 8 adults) were conducted at Pulse and ranged in duration from thirty to ninety minutes. My goal in interviews was to have participants share their perception of ‘what works’ at Pulse. That is, I probed to identify aspects of experiences that seemed important to participants’ acquisition of program goals. References to the National Research Council framework

were intentionally avoided during data collection in an effort to be faithful to participant perceptions of ‘what works’ at Pulse. Program documents such as the volunteer training manual and website were also reviewed to identify the supporting ideas behind the program such as mission statement, norms, goals, and objectives in order to ascertain why the program features identified in interviews and observations might be important.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Wolcott, 1994). First, significant segments of data from all sources, including interview transcripts, field notes, program documents, and my researcher journal were labeled with a descriptive word or phrase. Second, these initial codes were sorted into tentative categories based on the National Research Council’s (2002) features of positive developmental settings framework. The framework was deployed in an effort to connect queer and heterosexual populations through leisure practice. In particular, the eight features were used as a general framework through which to initially code and sort the data. Codes within each category were then refined through alternating rounds of coding and memo-writing to inquire into the properties and dimensions of each category. Although the manifestation of the eight features at Pulse differs in some respects, the National Research Council recognizes that the application of the framework may differ according to a number of factors, including identity. Further, no category emerged that seemed unrelated to the eight features.

Results

All eight features of the National Research Council (2002) framework received at least some support in the data. For example, the fact that young people spent the bulk of their time hanging out with their peers suggests that opportunities to belong and supportive relationships may have been important characteristics of Pulse. Adult staff members frequently mentioned safety as an important facet of Pulse, but few youth participants in this study expressed that view. Other features of the council's framework seemed to be encapsulated within the categories presented below. In particular, support for efficacy and mattering was partially a matter of enforcing social norms that celebrated the abilities of youth and providing structure that welcomed diverse levels of engagement.

However, support for efficacy and mattering and integration of school, family, and community efforts were the most consistently mentioned characteristics. Pulse staff supported youth efficacy by affording participants the space to pursue activities of interest at a level of engagement that suited the young person. Equally important was the fact that youth participation decisions were made in a climate that supported the abilities of youth and welcomed diverse opinions, regardless of the age of the individual offering the point of view. Supporting youth efficacy in this manner also seemed to bring several organizational challenges such as measuring outcomes of participation. Integrating Pulse within the broader queer community through a Pride March provided the occasion to welcome the heterogeneity of queer and connect with supportive others. Some members of the queer community experienced conflict over membership, as is the case in any

community. Supporting efficacy and mattering and integrating Pulse with the community seemed to be important and positive developmental features, despite implementation challenges.

Support for Efficacy and Mattering

Staff members employed a youth centered approach to programming in several ways. First, staff structured program experiences in a manner that gave youth participants the freedom to construct their time at Pulse as they saw fit. For example, young people repeatedly initiated activities on their own. The following entry from my researcher journal is fairly representative of a typical day at Pulse, “one young person suggested that we make quesadillas, another that we play guitar, while other youth went about talking with each other or engaging in social media without any adult encouragement (Researcher Journal, May 23, 2012).” Second, young people were also given a choice as to whether or not they would like to participate in structured activities, on days that they were offered. For example, a discussion group was held fairly regularly in which young people were free to discuss whatever was on their minds with the therapeutic services director. Staff always reminded the group that participation was optional when the activity was announced and indeed, some young people attended sporadically while others attended every discussion group. Similarly, some young people left during the middle of a sex education class while others chose not to attend at all (Field note: May, 27, 2012). Staff never singled out or questioned those that chose not to participate in any activity.

Third, staff members endeavored to create a culture of respect for the potential of young people. For example, during the staff training program, we were encouraged not to assume that adults have “all the answers.” If a young person approaches us with a problem, we were encouraged to be receptive to the possibility of learning something new or of the limits to our own knowledge (Field note: April 21, 2012). Respect for and celebration of diversity was also cultivated through program norms. Program norms included: a) respecting opinions that differed from our own and b) observing the right of others to lead or step back as they see fit. Indeed, a respect for the capabilities of youth infused many of the staff’s beliefs about working with young people. For example, during our interview a self-identified female adult staff member commented on the skills for social activism of one of the younger Pulse participants: “the youngest person involved in our organization right now is probably the one that I would follow anywhere, ya know?” Another staff member expressed a similar guiding philosophy in her interactions with young people, “...an 11 year-old can be just as ready for whatever life has to show them as a 60 year old if given the proper opportunities, environment, and safety.”

An important aspect of Pulse’s youth centered approach was supporting a range of levels of involvement by young people. Some individuals were highly involved in key decision making processes by taking active roles on the board of directors, the prom planning group, or the renovation committee. Ken, one of the more active youth participants explained, “...if I’m part of the board, I am more a part of Pulse—you transcend from being a simple youth here to being a part of the change that I want to see

happen.” In contrast, other young people expressed that having a voice in the everyday decisions of Pulse was simply not important to them. Informal conversations with a number of youth revealed that many young people prefer to simply “hang out” and talk with their friends rather than playing active roles on committees. Joseph, a high school aged young person indicated during our interview that he feels empowered in a variety of settings such as school and after-school clubs. As such, he stated that he is less concerned with being an active contributor to Pulse than with catching up with his friends.

Similarly, a staff discussion of youth involvement further underscored the importance of supporting multiple levels of engagement in Pulse. In particular, the discussion centered on a fundraiser to give youth the opportunity to raise money to purchase a video game system that several young people had expressed interest in. The director expressed concern at a lack of youth attendance at the fundraiser and several staff responded that young people may not have felt empowered during the planning process. The discussion revolved around youth empowerment and ended with the following point,

it simply isn’t practical to have every single youth become a major contributor to every decision. Furthermore, youth that prefer to attend Pulse just for counseling services or to hang out at drop in should not be marginalized relative to those that do. (Field note: June 19, 2012).

Respecting such diverse levels of engagement was not without its challenges. One senior staff member expressed during our interview that supporting youth efficacy

also brings with it challenges to accountability. In particular, if 10 young people on a given day are engaged in 10 different activities, measuring progress towards program goals becomes challenging. This staff member also explained during an earlier staff meeting that accountability issues go hand in hand with fundraising. That is, in the absence of measurable progress toward concrete program goals, recruiting new donors and applying for grants is very difficult (Field note: May 3, 2012). Regardless of the challenges of supporting efficacy and mattering, realizing this feature in practice depends on a number of additional factors such as recognizing the connections between youth programs and the broader communities that young people inhabit.

Integration of School, Family, and Community Efforts

The pride march that Pulse was involved provides a good example to illustrate key ideas in this category. For example, the pride march that Pulse participates in celebrates the heterogeneity of queer. As one youth participant in the event recounted, “[the pride march] is really important because people always felt like, you know, the LBGTQ community looked, you know, a certain way. And [the pride march] was a way for everybody, especially young people to say, “no, it doesn’t always look that way.” My field notes from participating in the march further underscored the heterogeneity of queer at the event. The emcee for the pre-march rally shared that this is one of the purposes of the event, to be “whoever the hell we want to be.” Further, the age (from infants to older adults), and mode of dress (with clothing from t-shirts and jeans to near nudity) of participants varied widely. Commenting on the fairly ‘normal’ manner of

dress employed by members of the Pulse community in attendance in comparison to the unconventional clothing of many attendees, one employee noted, “we must be the lame section.”

The pride march also brought a diverse group of people together in an environment infused with freedom. As one adult participant described it,

...seeing people that I knew there and just, there’s just this gleefulness about, oh, you’re here too and we can share this environment together. This is great and just, uh, just seeing people in this like state of pure joy and no filters, none.

Similarly, I felt a sense of community during my marching experience. Although I identify as heterosexual, I wrote in my researcher journal, “I felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself. I knew very few people formally, but somehow felt connected to those around me...I think that today, I was part of a community.” Pride was also associated with the marching experience, as one young person described the event as “the rise of the hidden community of gays.” This youth went on to explain that bringing so many individuals that identify as a non-majority sexuality together was a source of pride for both himself and the queer community more generally.

Importantly, these diverse individuals brought a plurality of understandings of the march with them. For example, during the pre-march rally, the emcee described the event as “about pride,” a show of strength through community, a celebration of infinite queer identities, and a remembrance of Stonewall (i.e., violent demonstrations by members of the queer community often thought to be the impetus for the modern liberation and rights movements). The event organizers described ideas of community,

fighting discrimination, social justice, and freedom of identity expression as core driving principles of the march. As explained above, participants in this study echoed some of these ideas in their own descriptions of the event, including togetherness and the heterogeneity of queer identities. As is the case with any community, efforts to realize these ideals involved some friction among members. Several interviewees recounted their own feelings of exclusion at the event, despite the organizer's message of inclusion. For example, the director of Pulse explained during our interview that he felt that he would not be welcome at the march because part of his job involves interacting with wealthy donors during fundraising events. He felt that his job responsibilities conflicted with the grassroots, corporation free structure of the event,

...they were saying [the march] is inclusive, but they in fact were only creating this space to include their like minded thinkers. And so it frustrated me because...you're drawing a wedge between the community where it doesn't have to be. Both sides can exist and support each other.

Another participant indicated that zi would not feel welcome at the pride march because zi felt that people that identify as transgender were "not encouraged" to attend the event. Despite the challenges created by membership conflicts, Pulse's embeddedness in the broader community seemed to offer positive developmental experiences.

Discussion

The ability of practitioners to design leisure experiences as a means to promote a successful transition to adulthood depends on an understanding of programmatic features

that promote positive development. Although the National Research Council's (2002) features of positive developmental settings are generally accepted guidelines to promote a successful transition to adulthood, less is known about how these features might vary among various populations, including LBGTQ youth. Results of this study provided some support for every feature described by the council, but two emerged as particularly significant for practitioners: support for efficacy and mattering and integration of school, family, and community efforts.

This study raised the issue of how best to support youth efficacy. Past research has often dichotomized youth and adult-led programs, but Pulse employed a blended approach in which youth and adults shared responsibilities for programming. In particular, key strategies to support the efficacy of youth participants included giving young people the freedom to initiate their own activities, a choice in engaging in structured offerings, and respecting diverse levels of engagement in the program. Staff also worked hard in volunteer training sessions and through both creation and enforcement of program norms to create a culture of respect for the abilities young people, which may have reinforced the efficacy of youth. Supporting efficacy in practice involved several challenges such as measuring progress toward program goals despite diverse activities and levels of engagement, recruiting donors, and maintaining authority over young people while respecting their participation decisions.

There is strong rationale to support the usefulness of a blended approach to youth voice. For example, John Dewey (1916) modeled his educational philosophy on the ideal of modifying classroom experiences to meet the needs of individual young people, an

ideal echoed in modern programming concepts such as goodness of fit (Walker, Marzcak, Blyth, & Border, 2005). Dewey hoped that a more responsive classroom atmosphere would facilitate the development of habits that would allow young people to function more effectively in their everyday lives. I speculate the supporting multiple levels of youth engagement in Pulse may have served a similar function. Consider Ken and Joseph's views on supporting efficacy described above. Ken desired to become an active agent of change within Pulse and holding membership on the board of directors gave him the opportunity to develop skills to do just that. In contrast, Joseph experienced efficacy in other aspects of his life, such as after-school clubs and preferred to use his time at Pulse to socialize with his friends. Although Ken and Joseph have very different experiences at Pulse, each individual may be acquiring skills that allow them to better respond to the challenges of everyday living.

Integration of school, family, and community efforts also emerged as important in this study. Offering events that highlighted Pulse's embeddedness within the queer community provided the occasion to celebrate the infinite queer identities and bring diverse people together in an environment characterized by freedom. However, these individuals occasionally encountered feelings of exclusion in their encounters within the event. Despite these feelings, the march seemed to be successful in promoting feelings of pride and community among marchers. The importance of embedding recreation programs in communities has been emphasized in previous research with African American youth as a means to enhance cultural competence and facilitate positive developmental experiences (e.g., Pinckney IV, Outley, Blacke, & Kelly, 2011) and there

is strong theoretical rationale to support the importance of connecting developmental contexts to the transition to adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Limitations and Future Directions

While it is logical that support for efficacy and mattering and the integration of school, family, and community efforts can promote positive developmental experiences among LGBTQ young people, the connection of these features to positive outcomes was not directly examined in this study. The voluntary nature of program involvement contributed to sporadic attendance which made evaluating the impact of participation difficult at best. Nonetheless, given the strong theoretical and empirical support provided by past researchers, support for efficacy and mattering and the integration of school, family, and community efforts appear to be important contributors to positive developmental experiences among LGBTQ youth. In addition, data were only available to explore the integration of Pulse within the broader queer community, not within schools and families. The consistent, negative reports of the effect of climates hostile to sexual diversity within schools and families suggest that there is much to be gained from celebrating diverse sexualities across youth ecologies. On balance, this study represents an important step forward in understanding features of positive developmental settings for LGBTQ youth.

Much remains to be learned about the design of positive recreation experiences for non-dominant sexualities. In particular, scholars might replicate and extend this study, focusing on other features within the National Research Council framework,

paying particular attention to points of commonality and difference between their work and extant knowledge. This study demonstrated that designing organized leisure programs for queer and heterosexual youth involves similarities, but also important differences. Elaboration of these connections is critical to not only advancing understanding of leisure service provision for non-dominant sexualities, but to positioning leisure as a site for connection among diverse populations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The findings from the three papers developed for this dissertation expanded the youth development knowledge base in two related ways. First, the papers enhanced understanding of positive developmental processes of LGBTQ youth, and second studies counteracted a pervasive, negative discourse surrounding non-dominant sexualities through documentation of successful adaption. The developed information should also contribute to professional practice in youth development settings by exploring features of an organized youth programs that might promote positive developmental experiences for LGBTQ youth. This discussion sections outlines both the intellectual and practical contributions of the research and closes with a call for future research designed to extend the reach of youth development theory as well as an effort to situate the present study within my long-term research agenda.

Intellectual Contribution

The overall study contributed to broadening the understanding of positive developmental processes for young people that identify as LGBTQ. Results of the first study supported many of the existing assumptions in the literature about markers of successful development and assets within youth development theory. For example, many participants in this study valued traditional markers of success such as marriage, employment, and school completion. When asked about factors which might support

their efforts to reach these goals, participants frequently cited social support, safety, freedom of identity expression and other concepts that echo developmental assets. These findings suggest that markers of success and developmental assets within youth development theory are highly relevant to participants in this study.

However, participant's experiences also diverged from the path to adulthood often described by youth development theory. In particular, compulsory heterosexuality created both challenges and positive adaptations that are not well captured when trying to apply conventional youth development theory to LGBTQ youth. For example, several participants described challenges in developing social support from friends or family due to negative reactions to their sexual identities. Compulsory heterosexuality also contributed to unique strengths among participants, by compelling some youth to create and seek out safe spaces for identity exploration. Future studies of queer youth development should focus attention on investigating the roles of compulsory heterosexuality in the transition to adulthood.

Sen's (1993) capability approach offers a useful means to think about the roles of compulsory heterosexuality in that this framework directs attention to the opportunities that individuals have in addition to their achieved states of functioning. For instance, although most participants in this study experienced social support and safety, participants also had fewer opportunities to experience these assets than mainstream youth. This lack of opportunities may go unnoticed in youth development theory because of the focus on achievements within that paradigm. That is, youth development theorists tend to focus on achieved states of functioning as outcome measures, such as school

completion or obtaining a job. Considering opportunities, in addition to achieved states of functioning may yield an understanding of development that is more sensitive to everyday experience than if achievements alone were considered. The capability approach also directs attention to priorities for social change—enhancing the opportunities that LBGTQ youth have to lead the kind of life that they want to lead.

The first study also functions as a counterpoint to the pervasive, negative discourse surrounding LBGTQ youth by exploring positive developmental processes. The second study accomplishes a similar function through an investigation of resistance and oppression in the organized leisure experiences of LBGTQ youth. Past research has often highlighted elements of oppression in the everyday lives of queer young people, but has often stopped short of exploring ways that young people might elude or resist that domination. Results of the second study showed that leisure experiences could contain elements of resistance and oppression simultaneously. For example, although participation in the pride march afforded many participants the opportunity for identity expression, the march also contained its own internal dynamics that marginalized some identities, such as transgender. Future studies should consider the ways that leisure experience might contain elements of resistance and oppression simultaneously, operate alternately as one or the other, or function as a recursive process in future research.

The second study also indicated a need to explore multiple identities in youth development research. Participants' sexual identities seemed highly significant in shaping their leisure experiences, issues related to race and age also emerged as important. Although single identity studies are useful as a means to direct attention to a

specific area of need, scholars that consider multiple identities simultaneously may be more sensitive to participants' everyday lives. In particular, multiple identity studies offer the advantage of being able to explore the ways that identities work together to redouble or mitigate oppression. Such studies also open up the extent of sameness to investigation and may therefore ignite opportunities for connection through leisure experiences.

Practical Contribution

The third study also contributes to an understanding of positive developmental processes through an exploration of contextual features that promote a successful transition to adulthood. Results indicated that the National Research Council's (2002) features of positive developmental settings framework was highly relevant to participants in this study. Two features, support for efficacy and mattering and integration of school, family and community efforts emerged as particularly significant. The content of these features exhibited similarities and differences to the council's formulations. For example, strategies such as giving young people voice in participation and creating a culture of respect for the capabilities of all people seemed important to participants having positive experiences at Pulse. However, results diverged somewhat from best youth development practices by highlighting the importance of offering opportunities for a range of levels of involvement. Programs that offer this flexibility may be better suited to respond to the developmental needs of diverse participants. Findings also highlighted the value of embedding programs for LGBTQ youth in the

broader queer community. In particular, participation in community activities may open up new opportunities for social cohesion, support and to celebrate the heterogeneity of queer. Embedding recreation programs in diverse communities may therefore be important to providing positive developmental experiences in leisure programs.

Future Research

Although this study represents an important step towards enhancing understanding of youth development in recreation contexts, much remains to be learned about the transition to adulthood among LBGTQ youth. Future studies might delve more deeply into the variety of identities described by LBGTQ. I employed the LBGTQ terminology in this study because it is the preferred acronym of Pulse and thus I used it as an umbrella term to refer to anyone that does not identify as heterosexual. However, exploring sexuality in this manner may obscure developmental differences between for example gays and lesbians or transgender individuals and bisexuals.

Studies that focus on specific queer identities may be more sensitive to these differences. Future studies may also benefit from exploring connections between queer and heterosexual development. There may be important differences in development that result from sexuality, but exploring similarities may lead to insights as to how developmental contexts can be structured to facilitate connections among diverse people.

This dissertation is part of a broader research agenda related to enhancing the cultural competence of researchers and practitioners to work with diverse populations. Future research may involve exploring the relevance of key ideas or theories within

youth development or enhancing the capacity of practitioners to serve diverse young people through studies related to program design or staff training for example. Although this study was conducted with non-dominant sexualities, I intend to work with other under-served groups in the future including youth with disabilities or affluent youth. Whatever population I work with or topic I pursue, my work in the future will be guided by the desire to extend the reach and benefits of leisure research and practice to more people.

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